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ESTHER AND HARBONAH

H. PEREIRA MENDES





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ESTHER AND HARBONAH

BY
H. PEREIRA MENDES



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WHY I WROTE AND WHY I PUBLISH THIS PLAY

Nearly forty years have passed since I wrote this play. I wrote it for my young people, for the cause of religious Loyalty, to keep them strong therein.

To-day other problems are forced upon our attention, some of them emphasized by the great War. Among them are social and religious questions, such as religious loyalty which keeps Protestant sects apart from each other, antagonizes Catholic, Greek Church and Protestant, and frowns upon intermarriage. Religious loyalty is one of the chief features of the Bible-book upon which this play is based. Hence the condemnation of intermarriage in two scenes of the play. And it is highly probable that the racial, social and religious asperities, prejudices, hatreds, etc., which will naturally be the aftermath of the present War, will bring forward the problem of removal of Jewish disabilities in lands where disabilities exist, and above all, the question, "Who shall have Palestine," when the future of Syria shall engage the great Powers' attention.

Hence Harbonah's earnest championship of the Jewish people, and his presentation of the high ideals of law and order, love, chastity and industry, for which the Jews have stood throughout all the centuries, thus earning the right to receive the consideration of the world.

Religious growths, thought-growths, all growths, must vary. Variation is God's own Law. There is room for all, provided they injure not. There is something good and something useful in all. Our problem is to *e-ducate, i. e., lead it out*. In all,

4 *Why I Wrote and Why I Publish This Play*

there may be, there will be, elements of danger, for everything that is good can be perverted to what is bad. In truth, what pages are more shameful in all human history than the pages recording religious persecution from the witch-killing of Protestant New England to the cruel Inquisition of the Catholic and the infernal Pogrom of the Greek-Church, in the name of Religion!

An adjustment of uncompromising religious loyalty, with a certain toleration of other people's opinions,—this and what I have stated above, are among the reasons why I wrote and why I now publish this play.

If this presentation of the old familiar Bible-story of Esther shall awaken religious loyalty in the hearts of any, especially where intermarriage is concerned; if it shall inspire the souls of any men and women who happen to read it, with a firm Faith in that over-ruling Providence in the affairs of men, which, by the shuttle of the Divine Will that flies to and fro through the eternities, weaves the man-made tangles, knots, breaks and frayings into something of a pattern Divine; if it shall create in thinking minds a better understanding of the love for Law and Order, Justice and Righteousness for which Jewish history has ever stood, and for which the very Founder of the Jewish race and religion was Divinely quickened; if it shall stir the hearts of the Jews and Jewesses of to-day to continue their proud traditions of the past and prove that still there are those who will dare and do and, if need be, die for their religion, my writing and publishing this play will be justified.

Above all, my labor, a labor of love, will indeed be blessed.

H. PEREIRA MENDES.

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY NOTES

The play itself is founded on the Bible-Book of Esther, with suggestions from Xenophon¹ and Herodotus,² the Greek Historians of that era; the Apocrypha, Medrashim or Legends two thousand years old, etc. A study of the Bible-Book and of these Traditions reveals a religious loyalty on the part of Esther that cannot be overlooked.

Esther, a Jewess, marries Ahasuerus, a heathen.

Nevertheless, as the Bible record states, she risks her life to save her people. She further obtains concessions for them from the King, a capricious tyrant, practically subverting his decree for their extermination.

Tradition further illustrates her loyalty by telling us that Mordecai concealed her for four years from the King's officers, whose duty was to gather all the maidens from among whom the King was to select his new queen. This indicates her unwillingness to be in contact with Persian Court-life, with all its viciousness and danger.

Tradition further points out that when she was Queen in the royal palace she refused the meals brought to her by Hegai, the royal superintendent of the women, and lived entirely on vegetable food, even as Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, noble Jewish captives, in the Court of Nebuchadnezzar,³ and for the same reason, namely, conscientious re-

¹ Cf. *Cyropædia*, in re Gorgias.

² Herodotus vii, 35, 37, 39; ix, 108.

³ Cf. Dan. I, 8.

ligious loyalty to the Jewish dietary laws.

Her personal attendants were seven Jewish maidens on whose conscientiousness she could depend. She gave them new names, Hulta, Rokita, Genu-nita, Nehorita, Rukshita, Hurfita, Regoita, names reminding her by their meaning of the seven days of creation, including Sabbath, and therefore assuring a weekly reminder of the Sabbath, which, even in the royal palace, she insisted upon observing as holy. And it is further stated that Mordecai's daily visit to the palace-gate was to give her any religious instruction she might need, besides, as the Bible-book declares, "to know of Esther's welfare and what was being done unto her."

Traditions of this kind are useful as echoes of history, or as folk-lore. The fact is that Esther had no alternative but to obey the royal decree to appear with all other maidens at the palace. For a King who had not hesitated to send his queen away, and who later deliberately consigned a whole race, men, women and children, to death on one day, would never have hesitated to seize any recalcitrant maiden and deprive her of her liberty, honor or life.

We may be very sure, therefore, that Esther went unwillingly to the royal palace, and was "a Jewess at heart," though she had to conceal her religion in her public life.

It is stated in the Book of Esther that all the men and women of her race in Shushan had sufficient loyalty to fast as they did; and that throughout the whole kingdom the Jews fasted and mourned, with no record of cowardly conversion. This shows that Jewish loyalty was not dead.

Not less is Mordecai's Jewish patriotism indicative of religious loyalty as having been the environment in which Esther had been reared and edu-

cated.

These facts afford me the opportunity to make her and her companions express loyalty to the religion of their fathers and abhorrence of intermarriage into which she was forced. (See Act I, Scene I, Act II, Scene I, and Appendix, Note on Intermarriage.)

Ahasuerus is generally identified with Xerxes, king of Persia (485-465 B. C. E.), who invaded Greece and fought Thermopylæ and Salamis, and whose wife, according to Herodotus, was Am-estris. The date-intervals in the Book of Esther correspond with the date-intervals of the Grecian expedition.

Harbonah's intense hatred of Haman I base upon the Book of Esther, Ch. VII, verse 9, where at a most critical moment he secures the immediate execution of Haman. He and Haman, earlier known as Mehuman or Memuchan (I, 10, 14), were associate dignitaries, "serving in the presence" or "beholding the face" of the king.

The wholesale massacre ordered by Ahasuerus is not without historic analogy. Alexander of Macedon ordered a massacre of the Tyrians (334 B.C.E.): Mithridates ordered the murder of all Romans and Italians in his dominion, male and female (84 B.C.E.)—80,000 to 150,000 were slain. Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain deliberately expelled the Jews to the number of 300,000 to 600,000 (1492), while the Inquisition slew, tortured or expelled or imprisoned over a million (according to Llorente). The massacre of St. Bartholomew (1572) cost the lives of some 2,000 in Paris and 80,000 to 100,000 in the provinces. Louis XIV of France drove out several hundred thousand Protestants (1685) through his dragonnades and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Though these numbers, quoted from authorities, are mere esti-

mates, they are sufficiently significant.

Spiegel ⁴ gives a very mild judgment concerning Xerxes, though emphasizing his waywardness; but Keil points out that Greek and Roman authors are unanimous in their portrait of Xerxes as a riotous, licentious monarch and an extremely cruel tyrant,—a character which quite fits Ahasuerus. He says:

“Xerxes was the despot who, after the wealthy Lydian, Pythius, had most richly entertained the Persian army in its march against Greece and had offered an immense sum of money as a contribution to the costs of the war, on his making a petition to have the oldest of his five sons then in the army given to him as a solace for his old age, became so enraged that he caused his son asked for to be cut in pieces, laid the pieces on both sides of the way, and ordered his army to march through between them; the tyrant who caused the heads of those who built the pontoon-bridge over the Hellespont to be cut off because a storm had destroyed the bridge, and ordered the sea to be lashed with whips and bound with chains sunk under the waves; the debauchee who, after his return from Greece, sought to crown the vexation of his shameful defeat by means of sensuality and revelry.” ⁵

Such a frantic tyrant is capable of all that is related of Ahasuerus in the Bible-book of Esther.

⁴ Eranischen Alterthumskunde (II, p. 402).

⁵ Herodotus, VII, 37-39; Seneca, de Ira, VII, 17). Herodotus (VII, 35; Herodotus, IX, 108, 599).

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MORDECAI, a wealthy Hebrew of Shushan, uncle
and guardian of Esther.

AHASUERUS, King of Persia and Media.

MEMUCAN or HAMAN, first chamberlain to the
king.

HARBONAH, second chamberlain to the king.

BIZTHA, third chamberlain.

DAVID, the lover of Hadassah.

KISH, }
ASHER, } young Hebrews of Shushan and friends of
SAUL, } David.

BIGTAN, }
TERESH, } officers of the gate and hired by Memu-
MARNA, } can as assassins.

DARSHOM, }
NARGAN, } hirelings of Harbonah.

HATACH, chamberlain to the Queen.

Captain of the guard.

Speaker of Jewish deputation.

ARBANAHAL (Willow-of-the-Brook), TAMAR (Palm), SOSANA (Rose), BATAINA (Apple of the Eye), ZAPHRA (Birdie),	}	early companions of Hadassah.
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HADASSAH or ESTHER, ward of Mordecai, afterwards Queen of Persia.

MYRRHINE, companion of Hadassah, afterwards Esther's attendant in the Palace.

ZERDATHA (Diadem-of-the-Law), attendant of Esther in the Palace.

IMMI (Mother mine), Esther's foster-mother and Palace-companion.

Courtiers, Ushers, Guards, Pages, Scribes, Trumpeters, Deputation of Hebrews, Processions (can be omitted).

Choruses: (a) Young men and maidens, (b) of courtiers, (c) of mob off the stage, (d) of Hebrew deputation, (e) royal choir off the stage.

SCENERY

Act 1, Scene I, Reception-room in Mordecai's house.

Act 1, Scene II, Outskirts of Shushan.

Act 2, Scene I, Reception-room in Mordecai's house.

Act 3, Scene I, King's reception-chamber.

Act 3, Scene II, Esther's apartment in the palace.

Act 3, Scene III, King's reception-chamber.

Act 3, Scene IV, King's bed-chamber.

Act 3, Scene V, King's reception-chamber, banquet chamber in rear.

MUSIC

ACT I. SCENE I

1. Chorus, "Though Persia's Dales."
2. "The Birth of Love."
3. Song: "Knowest Thou the Land?"
4. Chorus: Paraphrase of the song of Moses.
5. Chorus: "Hail, O Sister!"
6. Chorus: "She sits as enchanted!"
7. "By Babel's Streams."
8. Chorus. Prayer: Is there danger o'er us pending?
9. Finale, Chorus: "Away, Thou Traitor."

ACT I. SCENE II

1. Song: "I Hear the Thrush."
2. Prayer. Chorus: As the hart by hounds is hunted.

ACT II

1. Song: "The Zephyr and the Rose-bud."
2. Chorus: "Lo, How Awful Is the Emotion!"
3. Chorus. Prayer: Harken to Thy sons offending.

ACT III. SCENE I

1. Chorus: "All hail of earthly kings the first."
2. Chorus (mob outside): "Down with the Jews."
3. Chorus of Hebrew Deputation: "Father in Heaven, in anguish we cry."

4. Chorus (mob outside): "The ravens shall glut on the feast to be spread."

ACT III. SCENE II

1. The Queen's Choir: "O hearken" (Psalm 49).
2. The Queen's Choir: "Fret not thyself because of the evil-doers" (Psalm 37).
3. The Queen's Choir: "I lift up mine eyes to the mountain whence cometh my help" (Psalm 123).
4. The Queen's Choir: "He is our God, our Savior He!"

ACT III. SCENE III

1. Chorus of Courtiers: "All hail of earthly kings."

ACT III. SCENE IV

1. Royal Choir. Quartette and Chorus: "Angel of rest, spread thy wings o'er us mortals."

ACT III. SCENE V

1. Concluding Chorus: "Ye nations all."

ESTHER AND HARBONAH

ACT I

SCENE I

Reception room in Mordecai's house. Young men and maidens assembled sing following chorus before and while the curtain is drawn up.

Chorus. THOUGH PERSIA'S DALES.

Though Persia's dales be fresh and lovely
'Neath her sky so bright and fair,
Though meads and groves be sweetly scented
Nought with Zion can compare!

Her roses blush, her streamlets murmur,
Velvet clothes her ev'ry hill—
But though her glories melt in beauty,
Zion is more lovely still!

Sosana

What keeps our sister? Strange she sleeps
So long on this her birthday morn! I ween
Her dreams are sweet!—She lingers 'neath their
spell

Beyond the usual hour! Here comes Myrrhine!

(Enter Myrrhine)

Myrrhine, has not thy mistress wakened yet?
Go, watch and let us know without delay

Of e'en a moment, when her eyes unlock
 Their brightness to the kiss of morning light! (*Exit*
Myrrhine)

Arbanahal

Sosana, if aright the rumor be,
 The morning light hath rivals who would fain
 Salute the brightness which in Esther's eyes
 Is throned; aye, bask for ever there, content
 To let the swiftly passing hours fade
 In one unending dream of happiness!

Zaphra

What meanest thou? (*To her companions*) Sweet
 Arbanahal speaks
 As if that mystic pow'r which men call love
 Were a reality, and not as I
 Believe, a fancy—used for poet's theme,
 A mere invention which does not exist!

Song. THE BIRTH OF LOVE

(*One of the Maidens*)

When Adam lived in loneliness black shadows
 wreathed his heart;
 Some sounds—"lost chords"—he'd heard in
 Heaven mocked his memory!
 The light was dimmed, earth's beauty gone, all joy
 seemed to depart—
 E'en hope was dead and nought but gloom for
 him there seemed to be!
 "O Joy, O Hope, O Life's sweet Light,
 Do ye exist for me?"
 And crying thus he slept the night
 In dream's sweet ecstasy!
 Ah! Shall I whisper what he dreamed that night
 in Eden's glade?

He dreamed an angel dropped a gem from Heaven's vault above;
It touched his heart, it nestled there; to flesh it turned and made
A woman's form—then breathed and—there stood Eve for him to love!

“O Joy, O Hope, O Life's sweet Light!
I know you now!” he cried.
The gloom had fled, all earth was bright,
For Love was at his side!

Tamar

Yes, Zaphra, thou art right! Love is a dream!
But tell me! Yestern eve I noticed well,
When Isaac, son of Ezra, took his leave
And pressed thy hand, he took some time to say
“Good night!” And though thine eyes were drooped, thy face
Was flushed, as if the bloom of Sharon's rose
Thy cheek encarnadined! Five times he said
“Good night!”—so loath he seemed to leave thy side!
And when he went, thy glances followed his
Retreating form! (*Mockingly*) But yet of course,
this thing
Which men call love, is but a fancy, used
For poet's theme, and not reality.

Sosana

For shame, Tamar, for Zaphra blushes now!

Arbanahal

Let's change the subject. Girls like us know nought
Of love! Girls never do! Come, Zaphra, sing

The song you sang the other night so well—
Of memories of Palestine.

Tamar

Yes, sing!

We'll join, for truly 'tis a Hebrew song
To wake the echoes of the Hebrew heart!

Song. KNOWEST THOU THE LAND?

I

Knowest thou the land
Where Lebanon's great cedars proudly toss their
mighty branches,
And the sun, declining, bathes in glory Carmel
by the sea,
Where Jordan winds and glides beside the glades
and glens of Gilead,
And the moonbeams kiss the wavelets on the lakes
of Galilee?

Chorus: 'Tis the land of the Hebrew, his heart's
sole delight,
No joy can her sons ever know,
For their thought by the day and their
dream by the night
Is Zion alone in her woe!
For their thought by the day and their
dream by the night
Is Zion alone in her woe!

II

Knowest thou the land
Where vineyards are empurpled with the heavy
drooping cluster,
And the rustling of the golden grain makes mu-
sic sweet to hear,

Where verdant pastures stud the land from Dan
unto Beersheba,
But where ruins of the temple wake the heart
and call the tear?

Chorus: 'Tis the land of the Hebrew, his heart's
sole delight,
No joy can her sons ever know,
For their thought by the day and their
dream by the night
Is Zion alone in her woe!
For their thought by the day and their
dream by the night
Is Zion alone in her woe!

III

God protect the land!
The foeman's sword may drive us forth to die, or
pine in dungeon,
And the mocking of the nations Judah's children
long may be!
But on the day that sees us false, may Heaven's
light be hidden,
Our tongues be stilled, our hearts be hushed, be-
fore we're false to thee!

Chorus: O thou land of our fathers, our hearts'
sole delight!
No joy can thy sons ever know,
For our thought by the day and our dream
by the night
Art thou, Zion, lonely in woe!
For our thought by the day and our dream
by the night
Art thou, Zion, lovely, in woe!

(Or omit Verse II, and add instead after Verse III)

God inspire our hearts
 To wake the world to wage the war for Righteous-
 ness and Justice!
 Like stars, to lead the thoughts of man to Him
 enthroned above;
 And like the sand, the waves withstand of human
 sin and error;
 Like dust of Earth, to bring to birth the growths
 of Truth and Love!

Chorus: O thou land of our fathers, our hearts'
 sole delight!
 Through thee shall all mankind be
 blessed!
 For the thoughts and the dreams of thy
 prophets shall right
 Earth's wrongs—and the Earth be at
 rest!
 For the thoughts and the dreams of thy
 prophets shall right
 Earth's wrongs—and the Earth be at
 rest!

Bataina

Come, friends, we must not sing of woe to-day,
 'Tis day of joy! Let's sing of Faith in God,
 Of hope reborn, redemption, aye, why not
 Sing Moses' song and thus anticipate
 Deliv'rance from a second Egypt's yoke?

Chorus. *(Can be omitted, in which case omit pre-
 ceding speech of Bataina.)*

Chorus. HIS TRIUMPH IS GLORIOUS!

(*Paraphrase of the Song of Moses. Exod. xv.*)

Maidens

Sing to the Lord, for His triumph is glorious,
Warhorse and rider are cast in the sea!
My strength and my song is the Lord, the victori-
ous,
Savior of Israel's children is He!

Young Men

The chariots of Pharaoh are sunk in the wave,
His chieftains of choice are in Suph overthrown,
Engulfed by the billows the depths are their grave,
In Suph's great abysses they sink like a stone!

Both

Who of the mighty is like Thee, O Lord?
Who is there like Thee, glorious Lord?
Grand in Thy holiness, awful in praise!
Wondrously working!—O be Thou adored!
Build Thou Thy fane where all mankind shall cry
"Be Thy Name and Thy Kingdom established for
aye!"

Arbanahal

Enough, good friends; the time is passing. Why
Does Esther sleep so long to-day? We come
To greet the queen of all our hearts. I say
Of all. Good David, dost thou think with me?

Saul

Let David be, sweet sister! Thou'rt unkind
To rally him. But never yet I met
Young maidens in each other's company
But sure some mischief was afoot!

Bataina

Indeed!

Thou shalt repent thy words! We learn that man
 Was not complete until a woman graced
 The world, so dark for him without her smile!
 Thou owest much to us, I think! And now
 To say that mischief rules when maidens meet!
 For shame! Ingratitude, thy name is man!

(Saul shrugs his shoulders, all laugh at him.)

Kish

Stay, stay, good sister, not so fast! We learn
 That Adam slept while woman first was made,
 Implying that if he had been awake
 And in possession of his faculties,
 He might have made objection, and declared
 That he preferred in single blessedness
 To live!

Tamar

What, Kish! Thou most discourteous man!
 'Tis written that he found no helpmate there
 'Mong all creation. This implies he looked!
 One never looks except for what he wants!
 Then why should Adam look unless he felt
 The want of what he sought? In truth he knew
 His happiness was incomplete, until
 He saw good mother Eve, earth's last and best
 Created form, there standing at his side!
 And, sir, his satisfaction is expressed;
 What more would'st have?—Art answered?

Saul

Aye, I think

He is! A man were brave to fight a maid

With maiden's dart which Nature gives,—the
tongue!

But let me add 'tis not by any means
The first occasion when a man succumbed
To woman's talk!—Good father Adam first
Gave way,—then why not I?

Sosana

Why hear him!—Sir,
Dost in our faces fling the first reproach?

David

No, no, we must not turn this Paradise
We now enjoy to scene of discord! (*Aside*) 'Tis
strange
She sleeps so long! (*Enter Myrrhine*)
Ah, here's Myrrhine at last!

Myrrhine

My mistress wakes, and now she comes from out
Her sleeping chamber.

(*All rise*)

Myrrhine

(*Aside*) May the kind fates guard
Her fortune!—Never have I seen her rise
As on this most auspicious day! So strange
Her manner, so distraught her look, she seems
Another being, as unlike herself
As night from day! No smiles now flit across
Her winsome face, like Heaven's light! Instead
'Tis shaded by a gloomy look! And when
I greeted her and wished her many days

She heard me not, nor asked for Mordecai
 As is her wont!—So absent-minded, when
 By chance her glances rested on the gifts
 Upon her table strewn, she seemed as if
 She saw them not. No word escaped her lips!
 She dressed herself as if possessed by thoughts
 Which drove all things of earth from out her
 mind! (*Looking out, R.*)
 She comes! Great Heavens! What a change!

Zaphra

(*Looking out, R.*) Now, friends,
 Be all prepared—her curtain moves—she comes!

Chorus. "HAIL, O SISTER!"

Hail, O Sister! Hail the morn!
 Honored be this happy day,
 Blessed be it from its dawn,
 Heaven guard thee, thus we pray!

May thy lot be many years,
 Each as happy as this day,
 Free from sorrow, free from cares!
 Heaven bless thee, thus we pray!

(*Towards the end of the first verse of this chorus
 Esther enters, passes slowly in front without
 noticing. She sits on a couch, L. C., as if
 buried in thought.*)

Myrrhine

(*Coming forward*)

Alas, my mistress, once no bird so blithe
 As she! No music sweeter than her laugh!
 No sunshine brighter than her smile! But now!
 In one night changed! (*Cries*) O woe, unhappy
 day!

David

(*Advancing and kneeling at her side*)

Song. ESTHER, HEAR US!

Esther, hear us. O sad fortune!
 Evil spirits have possessed thee!
 Do but look and smile upon us—
 What is it that hath distressed thee?
 Darling, darling, do but answer!
 What is it that hath distressed thee?

(*Chorus Softly*) "SHE SITS AS ENCHANTED."

She sits as enchanted, unconscious of all!
 What shadows upon her are destined to fall?
 May Heaven protect her and give her this day
 Assistance, and chase all misfortune away!

Zaphra

What mystery enchants her? Shall we send
 For Mordecai?

Myrrhine

Alas, he tarries still
 At Memucan's!

Zaphra

My heart is faint with pain
 To thus behold her! (*Kneels, takes Esther's hand.*)
 Esther dearest, look!
 Thy Zaphra speaks to thee! Thou dost not hear?
 (*Esther unconsciously plays with Zaphra's hair.*)
 Ah! Now thou'rt coming to thyself again!
 O Hadassah, sweet myrtle mine, we come
 On this, thy birthday morn, to greet thee!—Look!
 (*Esther looks at her.*)

Thy Zaphra waits thy smile! See, David too,
 Is with us! Hast thou not a word for him?
(Esther kisses her forehead.)
 Speak, Esther darling, all thy friends are here!

Saul

Let's sing an old familiar song! Perhaps
 The melody will rouse her,—one she loves!

Sosana

Yes, let us try. 'Twas only yester-night
 She sang "By Babel's streams" at Zaphra's house,
 Her fav'rite song!

David, or Whoever Sings the Song

*(Sits at Esther's feet; the rest group round. The
 singer is handed a lyre by Myrrhine and says,
 "I'll sing if you will join.")*

Song. "BY BABEL'S STREAMS"

(Paraphrase of Psalm 137)

I

By Babel's streams we sat, we wept,
 For Zion's mem'ry cannot fade!
 We hung the harp whose music slept
 On willows, 'neath whose solemn shade
 We talked of Zion's glory!

Chorus

We talked of Zion's glory!
 We dreamed of Zion's glory!
 Where willows cast their solemn shade
 We wept for Zion's glory!

II

The captor cruel mocked the sigh
And bade us sing of Zion's songs,
With breaking hearts we made reply
"To Zion's land alone belongs
The sound of Zion's glory!"

Chorus

The sound of Zion's glory,
The songs of Zion's glory,
To Zion's land alone belong
The songs of Zion's glory.

III

How can we from the harp-string wake
In stranger's land the sacred lay?
Each harp-string, aye, our hearts would break
Before our fingers would obey,
For dimmed is Zion's glory!

Chorus

For dimmed is Zion's glory;
Alas for Zion's glory!
The heart and hand will not obey,
For lost is Zion's glory!

IV

O Salem! If thy sacred land
Forgotten be, if false we prove,
May mem'ry fail,—may palsied hand
And dastard tongues refuse to move
If we forget thy glory!

Chorus

If we forget thy glory,
 If we forget thy glory,
 May mem'ry,—aye, may life depart
 'Fore we forget thy glory!

*(Esther covers her face with her hand and weeps
 during the last verse.)*

Esther

Good friends, I know not what it is that moves
 My heart on what should be a happy day!
 Strange thoughts invade my mind and all is lost
 In one absorbing mem'ry of a dream
 Which seized my faculties throughout the night,
 And came again, again, a thousand times,
 Each time with strength ten-fold intensified!
 I am persuaded that a mystic fate
 Is working on my destiny and I
 Am helpless,—more, that if I could arrest
 Its course to leave me free, I would not,—no,
 Not e'en for all the gold Shushan hath stored!
 —What fate it is that binds me now so fast
 I know not! All I know is that I am
 Its willing slave,—the rest I leave to God!

David

Dear Esther, Hadassah, what is the dream—
 Which thus hath moved thee? Let me hear.
Mayhap
 'Tis but a flitting fancy and its spell
 Will pass away while thou recountest!

Esther

No!

Dear David, no! I am no longer what

I was, this dream hath changed me! Now I am
But as an instrument beneath the spell
Of some Almighty Influence.—I feel
A destiny awaits me! Oh, the thought
Impels the blood through ev'ry vein with speed
Of light!—I lose all consciousness of self!
All things of Earth around me glide away
And leave me here, with none to aid, e'en like
A straw beneath a torrent's might, a reed
'Fore blasts the mightiest that ever rent
The oaks they tell of in the land of Macedoigne
Which brave the anger of their skies, strike firm
Their roots in earth, and bid the tempest fierce
Do what it list! And when 'tis over passed,
Lie prone, uprooted, humbled on the ground!
So I, I have no strength to stand against
The mighty pow'r which sways me at its will!
I am resigned! I bend my head and let
The unknown force do with me what it will!
And now my dream was this.—(*All move as if
listening attentively.*)

Methought I heard

The rushing winds blow fiercely o'er the meads
That lay at foot of Persia's lofty peaks.
The sky grew dark. Portentous clouds I saw
Amass around the highest peaks of all.
They moved across the lea, hung thick and black
With thunder charged, with angry flashing streams
Of molten fire suspended; and it seemed
As if its fiercest fury was to pour
Upon the lowly meads;—as if the hills,
So lofty and so huge, made war upon
The fields which humbly crouched beneath their
feet!

When suddenly the raging blasts were hushed;
The air became oppressive and the noise
Of distant angry peals alone was heard!

The very birds rushed silent to their nests!
The very beasts sought shelter where they could!
And silence reigned, most awful! Aye, my heart
To beat seemed frightened, lest it should disturb
The scene's solemnity! I scarcely breathed!
My ev'ry limb was trembling as I gazed
Upon the lurid light that lit the gloom!
No word I spoke! All nature seemed so awed
That even foliage ceased its rustling sound!
Then lo! The leaves upon a myrtle moved
As if they prayed to God to help the meek!—
—I know not how it was!—I saw them move,
Like human lips, to Heaven turned! Forthwith
As if their pray'r was answered, all the clouds
Were swiftly moved beyond the mighty hills!
I woke and silently I prayed to know
The meaning hidden 'neath the wondrous dream.
At last I heard a voice upon me call,
"Thou art the humble myrtle, Esther, thou,
The myrtle,—Hadassah—the myrtle, thou!"
And Hadassah I am,—The myrtle—aye,
And born to hurl the threat'ning clouds from o'er
The lowly meads which seem to crouch before
The lordly mounts!—What mean the meads?
What mean
The mounts? I know not! But my heart misgives
Me when, as now, we lowly crouch and cringe
Before the Persian proud who scorns the race
Of Jacob's sons! If storms be coming, black
With Persia's hatred, doomed to burst upon
The head of our devoted nation, I (*Advances*)
Will dare the tyrant! If I perish, then
I perish! 'Tis my mission! Come the worst,
Ye storm clouds, I, the humble myrtle, I
Will break your strength, with Heaven's aid!
Come, fate! Come, fate! Thy will shall be obeyed!

Chorus. PRAYER

I

Is there danger o'er us pending?
Lord, then bring Thy children aid!
Lo, to Thee the race offending
Prayeth, be Thine anger stayed!

II

Save us, Father, grant Thy mercy,
Though we walk in sinful ways!
Yea! Thy mercy faileth never!
For Thy pardon Jacob prays!

Myrrhine

(*Looking out*) Look, good Mordecai is here and
with

A Persian stranger! (*Aside*) Would he were
alone!

Keep silence pray!—Of all the strange events
Speak not a word! Indeed, he loves her so,
That if he thought she saddened e'en, he'd know
No peace of mind by day or night! I pray
Be careful not to say or hint a word!

(*Enter Mordecai and Memucan, R.*)

Mordecai

My children, welcome on this happy morn!
(*To Esther*) My darling, Heaven keep thee on this
day!
May choicest blessings be upon thee show'ed
And happiness be thine; no sorrow cast
Its baleful shadow o'er thy coming years,

Nor aught prevent thy life from being passed
Amid the sunshine of unending joys!

Esther

I thank thee for thy wishes. How can I
Find words enough to thank thee for a tithe
Of all that goodness thou hast heaped on me,—
An orphan, thrown upon thy loving care?
I cannot show my gratitude, except
By words that feebly indicate it, yet
I'd give thee what is said to bring the grace
Of Heaven on the heads of those who take
A father and a mother's place,—the love
Devoted, undivided, aye, whole-souled,
From out an orphan's heart, didst thou not have
It long ago! (*Kneels and kisses his hand.*)

Mordecai

I know it, dearest child!
My life's delight! I find a blessing far
Beyond all price in sunshine which thy face
Forever brings! But here is Memucan,
Of Persia's nobles one of highest rank,
Entreating introduction to my ward,
(*Mockingly*) To pay his duty most respectful!
(*Aside*) O
I trust his condescending impudence
Will have the stinging check his arrogance
Deserves!

(*Memucan salutes Esther and leads her to the couch*)

Saul

'Tis something new for one of rank
To honor humble Jew's assemblage!

Zaphra

Well!

I know what welcome he would have from me!

Sosana

I wonder if he ofttimes visits here!
'Tis dangerous for Hebrews to permit
A stranger of an alien faith to come
So freely in their family! It breaks
The bonds of fit reserve and leads the heart
To stray from Duty's path—from Faith! For when
Love enters, conquers and entwines that chain
Around two souls which iron cannot break,
Farewell to peace in households then! Farewell
To union and to happiness! A maid
Of Jewish faith who weds outside the pale,
Is branded as a traitress to her race,
A traitress to her faith and duty! Aye,
And on the judgment day, if Right be Right
And Truth be truth, her soul shall stand con-
demned,
By both and by the God she hath betrayed!

Tamar

This bodes no good, believe me! There must be
Some hidden purpose lurking 'neath it!

Bataina

Yes!

The tiger never stalks the lamb for nought!

David

(*Hotly*) What wants the stranger here? His looks
are full
Of cunning! Watch him closely, friends!

(*Memucan and Esther sit on a couch.*)

Memucan

(*To Esther*)

Thou knowest not how I have long desired
To hold a closer speech with thee, fair maid!
For days and nights, for many months in truth,
Thy image in my heart hath been impressed
So deep that other thoughts could find no place!
No slumber e'er enchained me but I dreamed,
No dream enthralled me ever but thy face
Appeared as constantly as light by day!
With all humility, I ask thee, hear
A Persian's solemn word and protest! Heart
And hand and thought, yea, all that man
Can lay at lady's service shall be thine!

Esther

O speak not thus to mock a Jewish maid!
Thou knowest that a Hebrew marries not
Outside the holy faith. "Accursed the one,"
So said my father with his ebbing breath,
"Who dares belie our God by wedding spouse
An alien to our race!" And gazing then
Upon me as the film of death o'er-spread
His eyes, he said, "Be faithful to thy creed,
And die in wretchedness before consent
Thou'lt give to marry stranger to thy faith!"
Then suddenly he stopped,—his eyes lit up,
He rose upon his bed as if possessed
With strength renewed—he looked as if in-
spired!—
As if the future was to him revealed
And words to tell it lingered on his lips,
Kept sealed by pow'r 'gainst which he tried to
strive!

At last he gasped, outstretched his arms and said,
"Except a king—I see—a queen—who—looks
Like thee!" He fell exhausted in my arms,
Then turned his face to me, looked lovingly
Into my very eyes, then smiled, and died!
They said his mind was wand'ring! But I know
No word of thine can ever change my will
And make me disobey his dying charge!

Memucan

Nay, hear me, be not hasty!—All my wealth
Shall at thy feet be poured. No wish of thine
Shall be unheeded; what a man can do
To make a woman happy shall be done!
Thy jewels shall the royal diadem
Outshine! Thy slaves shall countless be,—and I
Most willing of them all! Thy parks shall charm
With velvet lawns, with foliaged groves beneath
Whose grateful shade shall purest streamlets flow
With crystal purling flood, reflecting all
Of Heaven's beauty, and of earth,—thine own!
Thy ev'ry wish shall be my law! No thought
Shall e'er be in my heart but happiness
For thee shall be its theme! Thy palace walls
Shall all with colors bright resplendent shine
And rival in their brilliancy the sheen
Of birds' most lovely plumage! Nay, the glow
And beauty of an angel's wing shall seem
But dull in the comparison!

Esther

Sir, hold!

Think'st thou to tempt me? If thou hadst the
wealth
Of Ind and couldst command the choicest slaves
That throng 'the marts of Ethiop's land, nay
more!—

If all thy substance rivalled that which lies
 In treasury of Persia's kings, thou'dst fail!
 Yea—more! Thy tempting me to break the word
 I gave my dying father proves thou hast
 No honor in thy heart! Enough, sir, go! (*Rising*)
 And learn two things, the first, a Jewish maid
 With aught of Jewish feeling in her heart,
 Would scorn to wed outside her father's faith!
 The second, that a Jewish child obeys
 The parent when he lives, much more when dead!
 And as for me, if ever dawns the day
 When Esther's tongue betrays her father's wish,
 May Esther's heart no longer beat, her tongue
 Be paralyzed and all her powers fail! (*Turns
 from him*)

Memucan

Thou scornest me? Right well I know that I
 Have lowered me to speak as I have done!—
 That I, a Persian prince, should stoop to woo
 A child of Judah's lowly race! Thou hast
 Perchance a deeper cause to treat me thus!
 I know not if thou mockest me to say
 A Jew his father honors! I have learned
 The Jews are exiles from their land because
 They honored not the one they ever call
 Their Heav'nly Father! Why, then, honor more
 The one on earth than Him in Heaven? Nay,
 Thou hast a deeper cause?—a lover,—yes!
 (*Turning to guests*)
 Then speak, ye men, who dares to cross the path
 Of Memucan?

David

I, David, son of Hūr!

Memucan

What, thou? Thou slave, thou dog! Then learn
from me
Thy love shall cause thy death! Thou dog, take
that!

*(As he rushes to stab David, whom Saul and Asher
hold back, Mordecai grasps his hand, Esther
shrieks, men move forward as if to fall on him.
Girls assume various attitudes of fright. Tab-
leau.)*

Men and Maidens

Arrest the hand!

Mordecai

What would'st thou, madman, now?

Memucan

I swear to slay the thrice accursèd hound!

Finale. Chorus. "AWAY, THOU TRAITOR!"

Mordecai

The shadow of my roof, O Persian,
Thou forgettest! Learn to know
That thou hast outraged what respected
Is by even vengeful foe!

Memucan

By ev'ry god in Persia's heaven,
Hear ye all, I solemnly swear
To wreak my vengeance on this rival!—(*To
David*)
For thy death, thou dog, prepare!

Esther

Thou Persian, hear a Jewish maiden
 Hurl defiance in thy face!
 Begone, and never dare approach me!
 Judah loathes thy hated race!

Chorus

Away, thou traitor, shame upon thee!
 Friendship, Virtue, Peace, Old Age,
 Thou dar'st to outrage! Shame upon thee!
 Carry hence thy cursed rage!

(*Curtain falls.*)

ACT I

SCENE II

(*Wood scene. Outskirts of Shushan. Bigtan, Teresh, Marna, cloaked and armed. Night.*)

Bigtan

This night's the last! It is the seventh eve
 Of keeping watch, and Memucan expressed
 The compact, "Watch for seven nights until
 You see a Jew called David, son of Hūr!
 Then kill him!" Then he gave description, though
 I know the man he means! Five hundred coins
 Of silver will he give us when we can
 Assure him that his hated foe is dead!

Teresh

Who comes?

Bigtan

(*Looking out*) 'Tis he, at last!

Marna

Be ready, all!

I will accost him. (*Enter Asher*) Sir, how fares the night?

Asher

(*Aside*) Some footpads! What they'll get from me if but

They leave my life, I care not! (*To Bigtan*) All is fair!

The moon will rise 'fore ends the watch! Good night!

(*They hustle him.*) Good night, I bid you. (*They handle him.*)

Hey! What would ye? Ho!

'Tis Asher, son of Aaron, let me go! (*They desist.*)

Bigtan

I' faith, he's not the man we seek! (*To Asher*) Begone!

We did but joke! (*They move to the rear.*)

Asher

(*Aside*) This joke had cost my life,

Methinks, if I my name had not declared!

But who is he they seek? Some Jew for sure!

For never yet was Jew for Persian ta'en!

I'll rouse all Jewry! Murder is afoot!

Ye villains, I'll defeat your wicked plans! (*Exit Asher*)

Marna

A good escape for him! But hist! Again
Some footsteps can I hear! Vile fate! It is

Some roysterers from out the palace, drunk
Like all the rest, while we are parched with thirst!

Teresh

I think that Memucan should pay for this
Some extra coin! We bargained not to be
Deprived of joining in the royal feast! (*They re-
tire, rear.*)

(*Enter Harbonah, Darshom, Nargan, the two latter
intoxicated.*)

Harbonah

It was the richest thing! I would I were
The King! (*Sees the assassins*) Whom have
we here? (*Calls to them*) Well met, my
friends!

(*Aside*) Three choicest rogues as e'er I saw!
Perhaps

They'll serve my purpose better than the two
I have with me, for Darshom is a fool
And Nargan,—he is drunk! (*Coming forward*)
I'll be the death

Of Memucan! I swear to have his life
For passing insult on his equal, me,
A royal chamberlain! And thus it is
To slay him as he comes from out the feast,
I, Harbonah, now walk the streets with two
Assassins who would slay their very child
For money! I'll dismiss the useless pair
And hire the others! Yes, I'll manage it!

Teresh

(*To Bigtan and Marna*) 'Tis best for us to meet
them in their mood!

A pest upon them! In no humor now

Am I for jesting! (*To Harbonah*) Ah, my friend,
all hail!

What news have you?

Harbonah

What? Have you then not heard?
Shushan is ringing with it! Why, the queen
Is sent away in deep disgrace!

Bigtan, Teresh and Marna

Indeed!

Darshom

Of course! Where have you been? Pray, are ye all
Custodians of peace in great Shushan,
And like the finest of police, know naught
Of what goes on, when knowing does not pay?

Teresh

We are not watchmen! Prithee tell us all!

Nargan

Why I, why I, why I, . . .

Darshom

Be still, thou'rt drunk! (*Interrupting*)
(*To Harbonah*) Thou, Captain, speak! Thou hast
the clearest head!

Harbonah

For seven days, as ye perchance have heard,
The garden of the royal palace free
Hath been to all Shushan, both great and small!

A Paradise it is, in very truth,
Surpassing e'en a poet's wildest dream!
Whate'er is beautiful in form is there;
What Heaven shows of glorious hues at dawn,
Or sunset, there we see,—translucent blue
Of azure softness, purple, orange, red,
With bloodlike crimson, opal, green and gold—
All melting, glowing, dazzling, like as if
The skies were robbed of ev'ry rainbow which
Hath ever spanned the tearful earth, to deck
The scented avenues and leafy groves
Of Persia's king! Then lanterns gleam and lights
Uncountable of ev'ry color shine
And make the whole a scene for gods, not men!
On ev'ry side are hanging curtains stretched,
Of white and green and blue, all looped with cords
Of linen fine! Imperial purple, too,
Of Tyrian dye the deepest, meets the gaze!
The very rollers are of silver pure,
Engraved and polished! Ev'rywhere are seen
Long rows of glistening marble pillars, carved
With graceful shapes and wonderful designs
From lowest base to lofty architrave!
Beneath the vaulting arch and leaf-hid niche
Are hidden gold and silver couches, heaped
With silks of Ind, Damascus cloth-of-gold
And priceless stuffs from earth's most distant ends!
The seats and tables are of rarest woods,
The former cushioned, piled with yielding shawls!
Then here and there are dancing fountains placed
With soothing splash to charm the ear as well
As please the eyes with spray reflecting lights
From every side! The steps, the pavements, all
The sweeping terraces, the fountain-beds,
Are choicest porphyry or malachite
Or rarest marble, yellow, green and white
And deepest black! If ever man had glimpse

Of Paradise the sight could not have charmed
Him more than that which I would fain describe!

Nargan

Now don't forget the wine! The scene was grand,
I grant you, and the lights were doubled, aye,
And trebled as we quaffed the wine! But then
Ye gods! The wine was better, thousand times!

Harbonah

Have done, thou fool!

Darshom

The wine? Don't talk, I pray!
Such drink the gods have not! Three flasks I drank
Of Chian wine, the best they had! Each flask
Was worth of silver pieces full a score!
No stint there was, the king's distinct command
Declared the officers should do the will
Of ev'ry man as he might wish! We drank
From gorgeous cups of gold, of patterns each
Diverse from other's shape. But death! The wine
Was grander, I assure you!

Harbonah

Then the queen
A feast for all the women made within
The royal palace walls. And here's the joke!
The king was merry—who was not indeed?
A bet was made who had the fairest wife.
The king declared that none with Persia's queen
Could e'er compare!—The bet was taken. Then
To Memucan, of chamberlains the first,
He, angered, spake, for vexed was he——

*Nargan**(Interrupting)*
Besides!

And drunk

*Harbonah*Be quiet, sir, I beg! A king
Is never drunk!*Darshom*

Be still, thou chatter-fool!

Nargan

No fool am I! For Memucan himself
 Could not fool me! I saw his cunning trick!
 He plied the king with wine, filled up his cup
 A score of times, but he himself, I marked,
 Made but pretense of drinking! No! He kept
 His own sly brains unfuddled, while he dazed
 The king's poor head! Nay more! I saw him drop
 A whitish powder in the royal cup
 Not once, but twice! They both were drunk, I say!
 The king with wine, but Memucan was drunk
 With some desire infernal to persuade
 The king to grant him gift or privilege!

Darshom

They say that fools and drunkards tell the truth!
 What is he? Fool or drunkard?

Harbonah

(Aside) He is both!
 But he will serve my purpose well! *(To the others)* The king
 To Memucan exclaimed, "Go fetch the queen—

The king commands!" Then quick they went, the whole

Of Persia's chamberlains, to bid the queen
Appear before the court. They soon returned
With blank astonishment depicted on
Each face! "O King," said Memucan, "we gave
Thy message! But the queen replied, 'Take back
This answer to the king! Let him not think
That I forget my dignity, as he
Doth his, nor yet imagine that his wish
Of such a kind will be by me obeyed,
To show my face to drunken men! Thus say,
That Vashti, queen of Persia, doth refuse!'"

The king arose, and mad with anger, asked
His learned counsellors' advice thereon!

The chief of all the seven, Memucan,
Then spake: "O, not against the king alone
Hath Vashti sinned. To all the nobles, aye,
To all the people hath she gi'en offence!

For when 'tis known that Vashti dares refuse
The king's command, no wife will more obey
Her husband's will! If with my word the king
Is pleased, he will remove her royal state
And choose for queen a maiden who will know
Her duty to the king! And let a law
Be made for ev'ry province (in its tongue
To better understand it) thus to say,
That ev'ry husband shall as master rule
In his own house!" Ahasuerus thought
It good advice and now 'tis law. This ends
The story, friends! 'Tis late! Good night!

Bigtan

Good night!

Harbonah (Aside to Bigtan)

Thou know'st the gate that leads the way to great
Damascus; meet me there, for friends I need!

(*Exeunt Harbonah, Darshom, Nargan.*)

Teresh

Well, well, we live and learn, we live and learn!
And so no queen now graces Persia's throne!

Marna

I hear a voice,—be still, it sings a tune
I've heard from Jewish throat,—may be 'tis he
At last!

Bigtan

I hope it is, I'm tired enough!

David

(*Outside, gradually coming nearer*)

Song. "I HEAR THE THRUSH"

I hear the thrush make heaven ring
With melody glorious, pure and sweet,
Till echoes jealous 'gin to sing
And answering soft the song repeat!
Ah ha! (*Flute answers.*) Ah ha! (*Flute an-*
swers.)

Oh glorious light, oh sunshine bright!
My heart with joy is stirred,—
To giddiest height I wing my flight!
Thus sings the gladsome bird!
Ah ha! Ah ha! (*As before*)
Oh glorious light, Oh sunshine bright,
My heart with joy is stirred,
To giddiest height I wing my flight!—
The echoes thus were heard!

(*David enters as he ends the song.*)

Teresh

Thou'rt merry, friend!

Marna

I know the song, 'tis sung
By Jews!

David

Well, I'm a Jew and so I sing
It! David, son of Hūr's my name, and truth
To tell, there's none more honorable known!
(*They approach him.*)
Good night, good friends! (*They press around him.*)

Keep off! What!
Help!—Ho! Help!

Bigtan

(*Stabbing him*)
Take that, thou David, son of Hūr!

Teresh

And that!

Marna

And that from Memucan! Our task is done!
(*Exeunt Bigtan, Teresh and Marna.*)

David

(*Falls*) Ah me! Oh Esther! Ah! I die!—Ho,
help!

(*Enter crowd with Mordecai and Asher.*)

Mordecai

Who cried for help?—What? Some man stabbed?

A Jew

By vestment!—Oh, great heaven!—David, what!

Explain!—(*Aside*) Oh, Esther! Woe for thee!

(*Mordecai raises David's head on his knees; chorus group round them, in attitude of sorrow, rage, fear, etc.*)

David

Oh, woe!

Prayer. "As the Hart by Hounds is Hunted!"

As the hart by hounds is hunted,
So is Jacob by the foe
Who remorselessly pursues him!
Thou dost see it! Thou dost know!

Vengeance, Heaven, thus we cry,
We, Thy sons in stranger's land!
Vengeance! Vengeance! From on high,
Vengeance on the murd'ring hand!

David

(*Dying*)

Oh Mordecai! 'Twas Memucan who vowed
To slay me,—Esther,—tell her that I die—
While breathing forth her lovèd name,—my heart
Was hers,—I die—while breathing—forth—her
name!

Prayer. "Peace, O Friends, His Soul Is Passing!"

Peace, O friends! His soul is passing!
See, his life-blood stains the sod!
May his soul be—Hush—Attend ye—
SHEMA ISRAEL HASHEM ECHOD!

Curtain

ACT II

SCENE I

(Esther's room. Maidens assembled as in Act I, Scene I. Four years are supposed to have passed.¹)

Song. THE ZEPHYR AND THE ROSEBUD

I

The Zephyr kissed the Rose-bud and she hung her
head and wept;

But Zephyr whispered softly while away he gen-
tly swept

The rain-drops which, like trembling tears had
gemmed her folded leaves,

¹ According to the Book of Esther, the king feasted his great gathering of nobles and commoners in the third year of his reign (Chapter I, v, 3), and Esther was taken to the king in the seventh year. (II, 16)—an interval of four years. Towards the end of 484 B.C.E., Xerxes returned to Susa (Shusha-n) and convened a great council to debate his proposed expedition against Greece (Herod I, vii, 7). He invaded Greece in the year 480 B.C.E., returned to Asia defeated after the battle of Salamis, 480 B.C.E., four years after his great council. Xerxes abandoned himself to luxury and ease (Ctes. c. ii, Diod. I, xi, Justin I, iii, 1). The conduct of Artabanus, a favorite, in conspiring against him, and seeking to gain the throne, a sad abuse of wine at a banquet are historical facts which I have utilized in the play. See Rollin Hist., Vol. II.

And this is what he whispered, "O, I'll die if
Rosebud grieves!

O Rosebud, Rosebud, lift thy head;
Thy lover speaks to thee!

O Rosebud, Rosebud, I would wed
Thy sweetness all to me!

II

The Rosebud heard and wavered, then she raised
her head and blushed

And slowly opened leaflets, each with wondrous
beauty flushed;

But Zephyr stole her sweetness, then, O faithless!
off he hied,

To other lands, while Rosebud drooped and pined
away and died!

O Rosebud, Rosebud, live again,
Thy lover speaks to thee!

But all the answer was the rain
Which pattered, "No, not he!"

Sosana

Hast heard that Jered, son of Issachar,
Hath wed a Persian maid?

Bataina

I wonder not!

His father cared but little for the laws
Of our beloved religion! He was what
Is called "a Jew at heart," that is, he had
No heart for Jewish duty! Synagogue
He did not visit. Worship in his home—
He knew it not! His sons and daughters grew
To manhood and to womanhood without
A knowledge of the duties, Faith and Hopes
Of Israel! What else can we expect?

The daughters marry out the faith or wed
Some "Jew at heart"—some compromising cur
Who hath no heart for God, no heart for
aught
Save worldly pleasure, worldly aim—as if
A life without a God could be a life
Worth living!

Arbanahal

O, I hate the canting phrase,
"I am a Jew at heart," from out the lips
Of dastard Jew who like a non-Jew lives—
Who breaks the Sabbath, scorns the Law, who lies
When saying, "I love God!" The test of love
Is sacrifice we make for those we love.
What sacrifice make "Jews at heart," like these,
To prove their love for Him they dare call God?

Bataina

This Jered, son of Issachar—take him
As our example! Call ye him a man?
His widowed mother lives, a loving heart
That loves and fears and serves her God. She tried
To lead her sons and daughters in her faith,
But husband helped her not! And uncles, aunts,
Companions, mocked at ev'ry sacred form!
Poor soul! she grieved, she mourned, because her son
Took wife outside her faith! That son! That cur!

Zaphra

He knew his mother loved him well! He knew
She bore for him the pains of motherhood;
He knew she watched his infant life, his years
Of tender childhood, aye, he knew it was
Her loving hand that bathed his fevered brow,

That watched the night beside the bed whereon
He tossed in pain or sickness! O, he knew
What mother's love and mother's sacrifice
Had meant for him! and now he pays her back!
His fist he dashes in that gentle face!
Her tender heart he rends! Her love he flouts!
His love for her counts nought beside his love
For woman of a faith that hates his tribe!

Immi

Who marries out of faith in which he's born
Deserves, obtains, the world's contempt and scorn!

Tamar

And as for him, to sacrifice the least
For her who sacrificed for him so much—
The dastard had not strength of will to snap
Love's thread before it grew to be a rope
That strangled duty, gratitude, and more,
Killed manhood, for it made a man a cur!

Immi

If he reflect, he must despise himself
Whene'er he thinks of mother's pain, e'en though
She suffers silently, as mothers do!

Bataina

Can man find happiness in wedded life
If parent's grief proclaims his treachery,
Ingratitude and moral cowardice?

Tamar

But worse than all, to know that he hath been
A traitor to his race, his faith, his God!

Immi

Thy words are true, most true! The man or maid
Who marries one of alien faith cannot
Expect a happy married life. For how
Can happiness exist when heart's remorse
Is quickened by the thought of memory
Of parent dead who, if in life, would ne'er
Approve? Or how can happiness exist
For son or daughter wed with consciousness
That he or she by taking spouse outside
The father's faith hath hastened father's death,
Or aged the mother, bent her gentle frame
With pain, humiliation, all the more
Pathetic since, through love, in silence borne!

Sosana

Some men, some maids, are made of selfishness.
The mem'ry of the dead, or love for those
That live, counts naught. How can it when the
thought
Of God Himself counts naught?

Myrrhine

The tragedy

Becomes complete and come it must and will.
The family becomes a curse, because
For others one example leads the way!
What should be done to keep the others true?

Immi

What should be done? Should man from truthfulness
Depart to make his gain? Should merchant swerve
From honor's line for profit men condemn?

Should soldier be disloyal to his flag
Because his puling child would call to him?
Then why should one, to gain his peace of mind,
Depart from loyalty to God because
His child to God hath been disloyal? Why
Shall parent compromise with honor just
To keep or win the love of traitor-child—
To gain the profit of a traitor's love,
A love proved false in that it stood not test?
And why shall father, mother, prove to be
Disloyal to their God to countenance,
Or compromise, forgive disloyalty?
'Tis agony for soldier when he leaves
His loved ones! He obeys! For duty calls!
'Tis sorrow for a martyr when he thinks
Of lovèd wife or child he leaves to fight
A cruel world! He dies! For duty calls!
The hero dares and dies! For duty calls!
Let parent say, My God, my duty calls!
A soldier's heart, a crown of martyrdom,
Some heroism let me have to dare
To serve my own, my father's God! My son
Hath closed his heart to me; his love was but
Pretense—my heart, my door is closed to him!
His love is dear to me, but yet my love
For God is dearer yet! My daughter, false
To me and worse, so false to God, may not
Bring traitress-kisses born from traitress-heart!
O agony, O nameless pain when child
Betrays his sires, his faith, his race, his God!

Sosana

We live in mournful days! Besides the news
Of Jered I have learned that fifteen Jews
Were murdered as they went to port of Tyre,
Through treachery that calls to mind the death

Of our beloved David, Esther's love. (*To Arbanahal*)

How long since thou hast seen sweet Esther?
Strange

That those who are so gentle meet such woe!

Arbanahal

Some days have passed since last we met. (*Looking out*) But there

She comes.

Bataina

Last night she dreamed, so says Myrrhine,
The mystic dream. 'Tis wonderful how swayed
Her mind hath been since that eventful night.

Myrrhine

In truth she hath not been herself since then.

(*Enter Esther*)

Esther

(*Dreamily*) "Thou art the humble myrtle, Esther,
thou

The myrtle, Hadassah,—the myrtle, thou!"

(*Sits on couch*)

Myrrhine

'Tis thus she ever is until the time
Arrives for Mordecai's return; she then
Is roused and seems to be more like herself.

(*Enter Mordecai*)

Mordecai

Ah floweret, art well this morn? Indeed
I hope so!

Esther

(*Arousing herself*) Aye, I think I am, but yet
At times I feel so sad, so sad, and seem
All things around me to forget!

(*Enter Saul, Kish, Asher, and others*)

Saul

Good friends,
We greet you! We have come to tell you that
The king hath just been pleased to publish new
A law, which, certes, means a loss for us!

Zaphra

(*To Saul*) Be careful what you say! Last night
she dreamed
That dream again, and is again so moved,
So much affected, that we are afraid!
And, more, this morn commemorates the day
When David met his mournful fate!

Saul

'Tis true!
'Tis true! Forgive me, for I did but jest!
But now remembering her grief, all mirth
Departs, like when the sparkle on the pool
Is lost beneath the passing cloud that hides
The joyous sunshine. David was as good
A youth as ever won the prize of love
From maiden's heart! And Esther—'deed I am
In sore distress to see her thus, poor soul!

Tamar

I hear the tramp of soldiers! Asher, see
What passes! Times are such that none can say
What strange things come!

Asher

(*At lattice*) A captain's guard
Comes down the street. It halts! The captain
seems
To look for something! Ha! He pauses here!—
He knocks!—He enters!—And two men on guard
He's stationed at the door! (*Enter Captain*)

Captain

Does Mordecai
The Jew, live here?

Mordecai

He does.

Captain

Is Hadassah,
Or Esther, still his ward?

Mordecai

She is, and, lo,
She stands before thee!

Captain

Read this missive then!

Esther

(*Reads*) The dews have fallen many times. The
moon
Hath waned and grown again while changing
months
Have brought the changing seasons. Nature's face
Hath changed. And so hath Heaven's firmament,
As storm clouds sweeping o'er have been displaced

By glowing sunshine, and the frown of night
Each day 'fore dawn's bewitching beauty fled
To western skies. But earth and heaven both
May change, yet he who writes this changeth not!
Thou did'st refuse to wed me, me, a Prince!
I vowed revenge. My purpose hath not changed
All these four years. At last my chance hath come.
Thou know'st that Vashti reigns as queen no more.
At my suggestion, all the maidens fair
Must come before the king, that he may choose
For queen to grace his throne, the maid whose
 charms

Of witching loveliness around his heart
Shall weave that chain which not the strongest man
Can break,—what poets rave about,—what kings
And peasants all experience,—what fills
The veins with fevered blood and sends it on
With bounding rush to heart and brain, to drive
All other thoughts from both!—They call it Love!
By formal edict now the law is made
That ev'ry maid from ev'ry town must go
Before the King. Think not that thou art safe!
Think not the love of Mordecai, his wealth,
His wit shall save thee! Ah! Thou said'st thy life
Thou'dst forfeit ere thou wouldst consent to wed
Outside thy father's faith! Thou must obey
The king! He sends for thee, for Esther, ward
Of Mordecai the Jew:—'Twas I who gave
Thy name! 'Tis I who send the guard! 'Tis I
Who tear thee from thy home! And if mischance
Should place the crown upon thy brow, within
A day I'd poison thee! I have the means!
But know the fate as my revenge shall glut
My soul! I'll sway the king to send thee far
From kinsfolk, friends, and all thou lov'st, to be
A slave, a royal gift to some satrap,
And in a distant province, where the blasts

From out the icy northland herald snows
Which hide earth's barrenness for half the year,
Shalt thou, unloved, unknown, drag out thy life
In wretchedness debased, till death shall come
Too tardy for thy prayers! Thy curse shall meet
Each day! Thy sigh shall greet each hour! Thy
tears

Shall mark the night's slow progress! Faint shall be
Thy heart with vain regret, and crushed shall be
Thy spirit as thy tortured soul shall writhe
In frenzy born of anguish and remorse!
I swore I'd be revenged!—I never change!—
And thus shalt thou remember

MEMUCAN.

Saul

Give me that letter! Friends, was ever heard
Such evidence that human villainy
Can so distort the human mind,—that hand
And brain and heart so treacherously fail
To show the presence of the soul, the spark
Divine? O villain! Though thou art a prince,
And I a lowly Jew, I swear by all
That's holy, that thy cowardice, in thus
Addressing one who, being woman, must
Command respect from ev'ry man whose heart
Is loyal to his manhood, shall receive
Its punishment!

Bataina

O Saul, thy tongue will cost

Thy life!

Saul

Then let it cost my life! What worth
Is life if all we love is thus debased?
O men, by manhood, by our life, our love
For God,—let us resist!

Asher

Aye, David's blood

Cries loud to us! Shall we stand by and let
 The maid he loved become the prey of one
 Whom men call Memucan, but whom we call
 A devil, fiend incarnate? By the soul
 Of my dead father, Esther shall not go!

Kish

No, no! Shall we permit our maids to be
 Thus torn from home, from purity, from all
 That's holy, to become dishonored toys
 For Persia's vile nobility? I swear
 It shall not be! Come, brothers, fight, I say!

Myrrhine

Yea, fight! O save us from this dreadful fate!
 To leave our home, and all we love, to live
 Amidst surroundings where we cannot serve
 Our God, as father, mother, served Him all
 Their lives! Ye men! Be craven cowards, or
 Be men!

(The men gather in front of the women and menace the captain and the guard. Esther makes her way to the wall, keeping her face towards the captain.)

Esther

I will not go! I'll die before
 I'll wed outside my faith! *(Seizes a dagger from the wall, attempts to stab herself. The captain leaps to her side and seizes her wrist.)*
 My dream! O God!
 My father's dying word—"Except a king!"—

O God of Israel! I cannot think!
O! Must I give my honor that my race
From some impending danger shall be saved?

All

Thou shalt not go! (*The men seize weapons from
the walls.*)

Captain

I must arrest her, then!
My orders are to take her to Hagai,
The keeper of the women for the king,
And friend of Memucan—worst fate for her!
My orders say, (*Reading*) If Mordecai would bribe,
Refuse! If friends resist, then cut them down!
They're only dogs! But by thy life, bring her
By force as I command!

All

It shall not be! (*Saul throws himself on the cap-
tain. Two of the guards throw him down.
The other men prepare to fight.*)

Esther

Shall I bring death to these my friends? My God!
Where is my duty? O, I go! Hold back! (*Asher
falls, stabbed by one of the guard. Esther
shrieks.*)

I go! I go! No blood shall fall for me! (*The
men draw off, Mordecai advances.*)

Mordecai

(*Taking her hand*) Thou'rt dazed, my child, and
art not well!

Thou knowest not what thou art speaking! Try

And calm thyself! I'll see the chamberlain!
 I have his friendship!—Once I saved his life!
 I'll offer all my wealth to keep thee home!
 Without thee, life for me will be so dark
 That reason will its seat forsake! For death
 I'd pray!—And yet I'd pray to live,—I'd die
 In agony of pain without thy voice
 To thrill my heart,—I'd live to rescue thee
 From fate most awful, whether spouse of king
 Or slave of vassal!

Esther

(*Kneeling*) No, O Mordecai,
 My kinsman, nay, my father, hear thy child!
 I must go hence at once! The king commands!
 My destiny,—my fate impels,—and I
 Obey. (*Cries*)

Mordecai

O Esther, Hadassah!

Esther

(*Starts to her feet*) Ah me!
 That name! The angel spake it in my dream!
 (*Walks forward*)
 "Thou art the humble myrtle,—Esther, thou,
 The myrtle, Hadassah, the myrtle, thou!
 (*Excitedly*) Thou fate, I go! I go! O father,
 thou
 Must try forget me! (*Weeps*)

Mordecai

Nay, my darling, what
 Is it that so distresses thee? O speak,
 For thou dost rend my heart! O misery!

Chorus. "LO, HOW AWFUL IS TH' EMOTION!"

Lo! How awful is th' emotion
Moving thus her gentle frame!
Doth her dream tell Heaven's bidding?
Do the fates their victim claim?
To the Higher Power, Esther,
We commend thee, we, thy friends!

Esther

Heaven's voice is calling, saying
That my destiny is working.
Thus I go, its will obeying,
Meeting all the perils lurking
In the dark and mystic future,
Threatening the chosen race!

Myrrhine

Darling, listen to us praying
Heaven's aid, that any parting
Be prevented, thus allaying
Sorrow's pain which now is darting
Through the hearts of all thy friends—
All thy friends who love thee well!

Mordecai

Daughter, what is it possessing
Mystic pow'r o'er thy affection,
Grieving us and thee distressing?
Pause and think in calm reflection.—
Dost thou love me? Dost thou love me?
Would that I could die for thee!

Esther

(*Taking Mordecai's hand between hers, and kneeling*)

O father, press me not, for I must leave
Thy roof which long hath sheltered me and go
Where fate commands me! Let me know each day
How thou art faring! Once immured within
The royal palace-halls it may be hard
For me to freely hear from thee, or thou
From me,—for spies abound, I know it well!
But if thou hast of news important, such
As thou would'st have me know by trusty slave,
Then this thou'lt do! Be near at hand and ask
To see the queen's own private choir, and bid
Them sing to me a Hebrew melody
Which I will recognize as warning me,
According as it is Hallel of praise
Or mournful song to mournful numbers wed,
That thou hast news of good or ill. Farewell!
Alas, farewell! I must obey my fate! (*Mordecai
caresses her.*)

Nay, do not try to keep me! Heaven knows
My heart is broken thus to leave the home
Where love of thine e'er chased all cares away!
'Tis God who calls me forth! As well attempt
To stay our fate as stay the cataract
That leaps from Ombra's heights with seething
flood
To find its bed in dark and deep abyss
Below! What lies for me in future stored
I know and care not! Firm in trust in God (*Aris-
ing*)

I go prepared for all! Aye, myrtle braves
The coming tempest as my dream foretold,
And Esther goes, perhaps a sacrifice
For Judah's race! If storms be coming, black
With Persia's hate and doomed to burst upon
The heads of our devoted nation, I
Will dare the tyrant, if I die, I die!
This, this is Esther's mission! Come the worst,

Ye stormclouds, I, the humble myrtle first
Will break your strength with Heaven's aid!
Come fate, come fate, thy will shall be obeyed!

Chorus. HEARKEN TO THY SONS

Hearken to thy son's offending
Asking mercy!—Let Thine ears
Heed our cry!—Do Thou, descending,
Answer with Thy help the tears
Of the exiled, outcast band
Trembling in the foeman's land!

Curtain

ACT III

SCENE I

(An interval of four years is supposed to intervene.)

King's reception chamber. Courtiers seated. Guards with weapons, ushers in front with staves of office. The royal throne is in the centre, on a raised platform with steps. Haman and Hatach are in front. Harbonah is seated near the throne, and watches them.

Haman

(To Hatach) How sayest thou? He would not
bend nor bow
To me, the King's Vizier?

Hatach

E'en so, great Prince!
For many days we chided him and asked
Him how he dared transgress the king's command
And neither bend nor bow to thee, as saith
The royal order.

Haman

Knowest thou his name?

Hatach

'Tis Mordecai, his sire, Jair; whose sire,
Shim'i was son of Kish, a Benjamite,

Whom Nebuchadnezzar took captive with
The king of Judah. (*Exit Hatach*)

Haman

What? 'Tis Mordecai!
Again he crosses me? 'Tis well for him
He gazes on the ground when I behold
His stubborn form erect 'mong all the throng!
Had I but viewed his face, the ev'ning sun
Had certain seen him hanged! What wretched fate
Brings him again to make me gnash my teeth
With anger and vexation? Twice offence
He's given me! Eight years ago he mocked
My need! For when I bade him come to me
That I might ask his money-aid, he failed
To see that I had honored him in that
I asked a Jew to enter Persian's house!
He mocked me and declared that he was not
A money-lender, since to Persian rogues
That trade he left! Again when I had thought
To win his money and his ward at once,
He took me to his house and made me ask
The maiden's own consent! Right well he knew
That she would mock at me! I'll be avenged
And have his life! Like David, son of Hür,
The Jewish lover of that maid I wooed,
He'll pay the penalty of crossing me!—
I'll have his life! And more, his hated race
Shall die with him! (*Musing*) But how to do it?

How

To get the king's consent? Is there a man
So much annoyed as I? He will not bend
To me! The tree that bends not, breaks! Aye, he
And all his cursed race shall die! I swear
By Persia's gods it shall be done! But how?
(*Walks thoughtfully*)

Harbonah

(*Accosting him*) My lord is very thoughtful! Can
 I ease
 His mind's anxiety? (*Aside*) I would his heart
 Were racked to pieces with it!

Haman

Aye, thou canst;
 (*Significantly*) The traitors 'round the king must
 be removed!

Harbonah

The traitors? Thou art jesting!

Haman

I am not!
 I have discovered that a certain prince
 Much honored by the king, had dealings vile
 With both Bigtan and Teresh who the life
 Of Persia's king attempted.

Harbonah

Good my lord,
 It grieves me thus to hear thee speak!

Haman

'Twill grieve
 Thee more 'fore I have done,—for Harbonah
 Is charged with knowing more of these two men
 Than trusted chamberlain should know!

Harbonah

What? I?

Haman

Yes, thou! As traitor do I charge thee to
Thy face!

Harbonah

(*Angrily*) Prince Haman! I deny it! Twice
Hast thou affronted me without the right
Of justice! (*Recovering himself and bowing*)

Yet I love thy grace so well
That never can I take offense from thee!
I know not aught of that vile plot! I swear
My innocence by all the gods above!

Haman

Didst ever hire Bigtan and Teresh with
Accomplices most desperate, to kill
The object of thy burning wrath and hate?

Harbonah

Aye, so I did! But not to slay the king—
'Twas but to slay a Jew, a wretched Jew
Who'd angered me, (*Keenly watching Haman*),
one David, son of Hūr!

Haman

(*Aside, starting involuntarily*) Another secret
known!

Harbonah

Was that a crime?

(*Aside*) *I had you there!* I love you! Yes, so
much,

That if thou wert to lie beneath my feet,
I'd leave thee not until the life were stamped

From out thy hated body! Once thou hadst
 The luck to 'scape my vengeance! Now thou'rt
 back
 From fighting Persia's outside foes, thou hast
 An enemy more dangerous at home
 In me! And by the gods, I'll be avenged!

Haman

(*Coming forward*) We must be friends; and I will
 save you all
 The danger of the charge already made
 Before the king!

Harbonah

I thank thee, Prince. Thou know'st
 That I regard thee as my brother! (*Aside*) He
 Or I must fall, and that right soon! On which
 Of us does fortune smile?

Ushers outside

"The king!"

Ushers inside

"The king!"

(*All rise. Haman and Harbonah take their stations by the throne. The guards prepare to salute. Enter procession in the following order: Chamberlain, guards, ushers, pages bearing scepter on cushion; guards, Hatach, royal crown on cushion, the king, whose entry is accompanied by all the courtiers bowing oriental fashion (Salaam) until he ascends the throne. Pages bear train. At end of each throne-step two pages sit, except on the top-step which is left vacant. Crown and scepter supported on*

the knees of pages on second step, until the ushers and guards closing the procession have entered and taken up their positions. Scepter then presented to the King.)

Chorus. "ALL HAIL OF EARTHLY KINGS THE
FIRST!"

All hail of earthly kings the first!
Long live the king, we cry!
May all his foes be e'er dispersed
Like clouds across the sky!

As bend the boughs when tempest blows,
As leaves in autumn fall,
So bend and fall all Persia's foes,
In vain for help they call!

From lands remote, the captives bring
For tribute all their store;
Long live the mighty Persian king,
The conqueror in war!

King

What state-affairs now claim our royal heed?

Haman

Of pressing haste there's nought, your majesty,
There's nought of outward source. Thy realms at
peace
From India to Cush, of provinces
A hundred twenty-seven, over which
Thy rule extends. For who can stand before
The power of thine arms? There's none on earth!
Peace reigns supreme! A deputation waits
From all thy provinces to tender thee

Their duty and congratulations true
By paying homage on this day that marks
Thy kingdom's happy anniversary.

King

The royal thanks are thine! To thee belongs
The credit for reducing all to peace
Beneath our sway! What can we in reward
Bestow upon our trusty Haman? We
Would fain express the approbation which
He earns, and give substantial proof of what
We mean!

Haman

Your Majesty is much too good!
Already hast thou placed me 'fore the rest
Of all thy court! That Haman loves the king,
He need not say! (*Hesitatingly*) And loving him,
he feels
Distressed!

King

What? Speak, what cause exists that thou
Of all my courtiers now shouldst feel distressed?

Haman

Your Majesty, there is a people which
Dispersed and scattered through thy realms are yet
Among thy subjects separated. Yea,
The laws that govern them are different
From those of ev'ry nation, and the laws
Of Persia's king they do not execute,
Nor is it to thy profit that thou shouldst
This people tolerate. Now if it please
The king, so great the love of duty which

I bear thee, let an edict be decreed
Commanding their destruction, and a sum
Of silver talents will I pay, in all
Ten thousand, to the treasures of the king.

King

Ah, Haman! Ever loving, ever true
And never knowing sacrifice too great!
The silver thou shalt keep. And now to show
That we appreciate thy watchfulness
For Persia's glory which this people hold
In no respect, in that they honor not
The laws that we have passed, I give them all
To thee, to do with them what seemeth good!
And this I hand to thee, the royal seal, (*Giving*

Haman his ring)

That all may do thy bidding!

Haman

(*Kneeling*)

What I say

But feebly echoes what of gratitude

I would express for favor undeserved.

There is no haste——

King

(Interrupting)

Sollicitous am I

To execute thy plans! Call in the scribes.

What time dost thou prefer? What month? What day? (*Enter scribes.*)

Haman

The thirteenth day of what they call Adar.

(*Aside*) So said the lots I cast!—Ye gods! I wind
The king around my finger like a straw!

King

(*To scribes*) To governors and princes, all who
rule

In Persia's name, in ev'ry province thus
The king commands and seals it with his ring;
That all the Jews in all the realm shall die
The thirteenth day of month Adar, the old
And young, the women; and the children; all
Their goods to be the spoil of him who likes!
Let this be sent by royal post throughout
The hundred twenty-seven provinces,
And be it now proclaimed with trumpet sound
From off the royal palace terraces!

(*Trumpets sound without. Proclamation repeated.*)

Chorus. (Mob outside) DOWN WITH THE JEWS

Down with the Jews! Down with the Jews!

Death to the nation which dares to refuse
To honor the laws of the king of the realm!

Ho! Slaughter and plunder—Up! Slay, over-
whelm

In death and destruction the whole of the race!

Ho! Death to the nation! We'll leave not a
trace

Of people so hated! With fire and with sword

We'll kill throughout Persia the thrice cursed
horde!

Officers of the Court

Your Majesty, a deputation waits
And asks thy grace to enter and be heard!

King

Did ever Persia's king refuse to hear

The prayers of his people? Bid them come!
(*Enter a deputation of Hebrews. King extends his
scepter to the leader.*)

Spokesman

Your Majesty, may Heaven bless thy pow'r!
Thy servants, we, the heads of synagogues
And colleges, were passing by the gate
Of this thy palace, in the bridal train
Of one who weds to-day the head of all
The Jews within thy realm. O let us speak!
Thy proclamation have we heard! We come
Entreating thee before it is too late,
Lest word of thine shall loose foul massacre,
Rapine and Hate, against thy Hebrew slaves!
What have we done,—what is our crime?

King

Enough!

When once the royal word is passed, 'tis law!
And by the law of Persians and of Medes,
A law once passed can never be recalled!

Chorus. IN ANGUISH WE CRY

Father in Heaven, in anguish we cry
To Thee, our Protector! O send from on high
Message of comfort; O stretch out Thy hand
And rescue Thy servants in enemy's land!
O Thou Omnipotent, humbly we cry!

As panteth the hart in his thirst for the stream,
So sigh we for mercy,—Bestow but a gleam
Of hope for Thy people, Thou, thronèd above!
O haste to our Help, through Thy fatherly love!
Father Omnipotent, humbly we cry!

(*This chorus of the Hebrews may be repeated, while the mob outside sings as follows, the music of the prayer and the mob-chorus harmonising, while the courtiers blend the melody of the "All Hail of Earthly Kings."*)

Chorus of Mob (Outside). "THE RAVENS SHALL
GLUT!"

The ravens shall glut on the feast to be spread!
The land shall be hid 'neath the heaps of their dead!
The echoes shall answer their last dying cry,
The flames leaping upward shall redden the sky
And feed on their bodies, till furious and wild
They end the whole nation, man, woman and child.
Then down with the Jews! Ho! Death to the
Jews!

Ye gods of great Persia, bring death to the Jews!

Curtain falls

SCENE II

(*Esther's apartment in the royal palace; couches, etc. Myrrhine and Zerdatha. Queen's Choir outside*)

Myrrhine

Zerdatha, has the queen retired to-day?

Zerdatha

She has, at least I hope she has!

Myrrhine

And why?

Zerdatha

Because the outcry raised against the Jews
Fills all the palace.

Myrrhine

(*Astonished*) What is that thou say'st?

Zerdatha

Against the Jews?

Why, yes! Hast thou not heard?

Myrrhine

Zerdatha, no! I prithee tell me all!

Zerdatha

The king, at Haman's pray'r, hath made a law
That all the Jews in all the realm shall die
The thirteenth of the month Adar, the old,
The young, the women and the children; and
Their goods shall be the spoil of him who likes!
When first he made the law that ev'ry man
Should be the master in his house, they all
Who heard it wondered what was meant! And
now

He makes a law to kill the Jews; a race
So harmless! All Shushan is much perplexed!

Myrrhine

(*Aside*) Great heaven! Woe, my mistress! See,
she comes! (*Enter Esther*)

Esther

(*Takes seat on couch*)

For four years, aye, and more, have I been queen
And never once the mystic cause that sent

Me from my childhood's roof have I forgot.
 But yesternight the old, old dream appalled
 Me with its vividness. In all the years
 That I have passed within these walls, not once
 It came to me until the night which just
 Hath fled!

Myrrhine

Your Majesty is sad to-day!

Esther

Myrrhine, the olden name hath sweeter sound!
 I love not state, and in my chamber 'lone
 With thee, I would have none of it! God know'th
 That I detest the glory of a queen!
 I hate this state! I loathe this wedded life!

(Weeps, then rises in prayer.)

O God! Thou know'st my heart, my agony!
 My queenship I abhor! The crown, the robes
 Of royalty I never wear unless
 Compelled! The court, the life, the food, I loathe!
 Not once hath unclean food defiled my soul!
 Thy Holy Days, Thy Sabbaths, I have kept!
 But never peace of soul have I, Thy child,
 Once known since I was torn from Mordecai
 And dragged to this accursèd agony
 Of gilded prison-shame, of womanhood
 Degraded! God of Abraham, my trust
 Is firm in Thee! Is firm in Thee!

Myrrhine

What ails

My darling? *(Leads her to a couch)*

Esther

Yesternight I dreamt the dream
 Again. Thou canst remember it?

Myrrhine

Ah, yes!

Esther

(*Soft music*) And when the mystic voice declared
that I

Was Hadassah the myrtle, soft I heard
An angels' chorus sings "The time's at hand!"
I started in my dream. I waked, and saw
A brilliant flash of glorious light fly swift
Across the sky! And since that moment, I
Have heard the angels' voices ever chant
"The time's at hand," "The time's at hand!"

While I

Am conscious of the helpless feeling which
Before possessed me! Destiny is like
A mighty torrent, carrying all with flood
Resistless! How can I withstand it, if
I would? (*Zerdatha fans the queen as she reclines
on couch.*)

Myrrhine

(*Comes forward*) 'Tis strange that Esther dreams
again

The very night succeeding this command
To slaughter all her people! Can it be
That she is heaven-chosen, and designed
To save our race beneath the peril which
Endangers our existence? True it is,
As Judah's sages teach, a Providence
Protects the chosen nation, and to save
Us watches ever! But is Esther queen
To bring about our nation's safety? She
Is queen because a dream enthralled her mind.
That dream! Did Heaven send it? God will tell!
Of old the finger of the Lord for us
In Egypt moved;—perchance it moveth now!

Zerdatha

Now if it please your majesty to call
 The royal singers, they will sing and chase
 Away the care which sits enthroned upon
 Thy brow, sweet Hadassah!

Esther

Aye—let them sing
 Without the chamber, that the music soft
 May sound, and be in more accord with what
 My heart now feels—misgiving—sadness—woe!

*(As she reclines, a few bars are played of the psalm
 for the house of mourning.*)*

*(Esther listens, startled and in fear. The choir
 hardly sings a line before she starts up with a
 cry, exclaiming)*

The song of death! The song of death!—'Tis sung
 Where dead are mourned! Alas for Mordecai!
 He's dead! He's dead,—and I was not with him!
*(She buries her face in the cushions, convulsed with
 grief; Myrrhine and Zerdatha comfort her.)*

Choir outside. PSALM XLIX

"O hearken to this, all ye people, I pray,
 Both humble and high, aye, both needy and rich,
 All dwellers of earth, O give ear and attend!

* This belongs to the class of melodies known as Al-martaye, from the Spanish "El Mortaja," "hymn of the shroud" (Sachs). Jelinek derives it from the Arabic, equivalent to Oratio funebris. (D. A. de Sola. Essay on ancient music of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, London, 1857).

My mouth shall give utt'rance to things that are
wise!

Mine ear I'll incline to the parable dark,
And open my myst'ry with harps' sweetest chord!
Oh why shall I fear for the darkest of days?
Can guile of deceivers encompass me?
The wise and the foolish all perish alike,
The vile and the good, all are mortals and die."

Myrrhine

O Esther, fear not! Rather let me send
For Mordecai; he lives; he is not dead!

Zerdatha

I saw him as he went from out the gate
This very morning, for he passed beneath
My lattice!

Esther

(*Moaning*) Send, Oh, send for Mordecai!

Myrrhine

(*To page*) Is Hatach there in waiting? (*Exit and
enter page*)

Page

Hatach comes! (*Enter Hatach*)

Myrrhine

What news is there of Mordecai who sits
Beneath the palace gate?

Hatach

The law declares
That no man enters royal presence clad

In sackcloth or with signs of mourning. Thus
Hath Mordecai departed from the gate.

Esther

(*Alarmed*) What's that thou sayest! Go to
Mordecai
And take him clothes and bid him cast aside
The sackcloth! Ask him what it is and why
He mourns! (*Exit Hatach*) I feel, I know, some
ill impends!

Choir. FRET NOT. *Psalm XXXVII*

"Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be
thou envious against the workers of iniquity,
For they shall soon be cut down like grass, and
wither as the green herb.
Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell
in the land and verily thou shalt be fed.
Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give
thee the desires of thine heart.
Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him,
and He shall bring it to pass;
And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the
light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.
Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; fret
not thyself because of him who prospereth in
his way, because of the man who bringeth
wicked devices to pass."

Hatach

Your Majesty, a message thus he sends,—
That Haman promises to pay the king
A sum of money that he may destroy
The Jews, and thus it is expressed in this
A copy of the law which thou'rt to read.

Myrrhine

(Takes the paper from him and reads:)

"That all the Jews in all the realm shall die
The thirteenth of the month Adar, the old
And young, the women and the children, and
Their goods to be the spoil of him who likes."

Hatach

And thus I am to speak to thee, the queen,
From Mordecai, that thou must go thyself
And supplicate the king to save thy race.

Esther

(Aside) My dream! At last, my dream! I go!
Oh, fate!

I go! Yet stay—*(Hesitates)* My heart misgives
me—death

Is said to be the penalty for those
Who go unsummoned 'fore the king; then how
Can I attempt to see him? I'll—No, I—
Great God of Israel! What shall I do?—
A woman weak!—I know not how to act!—

(Pauses and thinks a moment)

Say this to Mordecai: he surely knows,
As all in Persia know, that no one dares
To enter royal presence in the court
Where king is throned, except that he be called.
Nor man nor woman dare intrude, for death's
Declared the penalty by Persia's law.
And I for thirty days have not been called.
Thus say to Mordecai, I dare not go! *(Exit Hatach)*

But yet should not the myrtle dare the storm?

Oh! God forgive me! What is it I said?
 I go! (*Calls*) Ho! Hatach! Call him back! Say
 true
 To fate the myrtle goes! Queen Esther goes!
 For God's my help—I go—O say I go!

Myrrhine

Be strong! O Hadassah! Alas, the day
 That thou didst leave the roof of Mordecai!

Esther

(*Excited*) No, no! 'Twas fate! 'Twas destiny,
 in truth
 'Twas God! Yes, Esther goes! I go! I go!

Myrrhine

Remember, Heaven never fails to save
 The sons of Jacob in emergency!

Esther

We'll pray for aid. (*To page*) Go, bid them sing
 the hymn
 Consigning us and all we have to God. (*Exit page
 to choir*)

Choir (outside)

Psalm cxxiii: I LIFT UP MINE EYES TO THE
 MOUNTAINS

"I lift up mine eyes to the mountains, whence com-
 eth my help. . . ."

(*Enter Hatach*)

Hatach

Thus Mordecai commands me to the queen:
 "Imagine not within thy soul that thou

Shalt find escape in palace walls of all
The Jews. For if thou wilt indeed maintain
A silence now, be sure enlargement and
Deliverance shall rise from other source
To save the Jews. But thou, thy father's house,
Shall surely die! And who can know but that
For such a time as this thou wert enthroned
As Persia's queen?"

Esther

Return to Mordecai,
For Esther knows herself again and now
She falters not! And thus thou art to say:
"Go, gather all the Jews Shushan can count
And fast for me; aye, neither eat nor drink
By day or night until three days be passed;
And thus will I and all my maids as well.
Then Esther goes before the royal throne,—
Against the law,—but Hadassah dares all,
And if I perish, then I perish! Aye,
At last I face my mission! Come the worst,
Ye storm-clouds! I, the myrtle, first
Shall break your strength with Heaven's aid!
Come, fate; come, fate, thy will is now obeyed!

Choir. (Concluding verse of ancient hymn)

He is our God, our Savior He,
Our sheltering rock in sad misfortune's hour,
Our standard, refuge, portion shall He be,
Our lot's Disposer when we seek His pow'r.
Into His hands our spirit we consign
Whilst wrapped in sleep, that we again may wake:
And with our soul, our body we resign
The Lord with us—no fears our soul can shake!

Curtain

SCENE III

(*King's reception chamber. King seated, Harbonah standing before him. Biztha, other chamberlains, guards.*)

King

(*To Harbonah*) It cannot be that Haman false has proved!
I'll not believe it! No!

Harbonah

Your Majesty,
I know for fact well ascertained, that he
Had dealings vile with Teresh and Bigtan
And Marna. Two of these whom I have named
Were hanged upon the gallows for the crime
Of treason 'gainst thy royal life. The third
Yet lives, and will confess that he was hired
By Haman, then called Memucan, to slay
A harmless Jew who truly loved a maid
Whom Haman sought to wed!

King

Bring Marna now! (*Exeunt guards*)

Harbonah

(*Aside*) My chance has come! And fortune smiles!
If now
I poison not the royal mind against
The hated Haman, may my God ne'er aid
Nor more remember Harbonah's revenge! (*Enter
guards with Marna*)

King

(*To Marna*) What knowest thou of Memucan?

Marna

But this,

Your Majesty! That I, with others two,
Were by him hired. Their names, I well recall,
Were Teresh and Bigtan, and both were hanged
For foul conspiracy against thy life.

King

What service was required of thee?

Marna

To slay

One David, son of Hūr, whom Memucan
Detested, and we slew him!

King

And what more

Hadst thou to do for him?

Marna

No more.

King

Thou know'st

No part of Teresh's plot to take my life?

Marna

No, no, your Majesty! I never saw
The man again!

King

(*Musingly*) That matters not! (*Marna is led
out.*) It seems

That Haman hired the traitors once! Then why
Not once again? (*To Harbonah*) I'll try the man
and thou

Shalt justice have! If it be true as thou
Hast said, that Haman seeks the royal throne
And would supplant me as is sometimes done,
I'll be more hasty to degrade him than
I was to honor him! I'll lower him!
I'll take his dignity, his all, his life!
No traitor lives so close to Persia's king!

(Flourish of trumpets; enter Hatach)

Biztha

Your Majesty, if now it please the king,
Prince Haman waits without and craves to hold
An audience immediate with thee!

King

(To Harbonah) Stand close behind me! *(To Biz-
tha)* Let him enter now!

(Enter Haman. Harbonah stands behind the king.)

Haman

Your Majesty, it is my pride to state
That victory again hath crowned thine arms.
The pirates of the West, from Græcia's coast,
Who suddenly appeared when all was peace,
Are scattered by the fleet I sent to fight
The robbers who presumed to capture and
To burn a royal treasure-ship which came
From Rhodes.

King

We thank thee, Haman, for thy zeal
And will reward thee!

Haman

(*Coming forward*) The law forbids! 'Tis death to
all who dare
To come unsummoned 'fore the king!

King

(*Suspiciously*) Except
The king extend the sceptre! But perhaps
Thou would'st demand her life?

Harbonah

(*Aside to king*) As like as not!

Haman

(*Confused*) No, no! I think—That is—

King

(*Coldly*) Thou mayest go!
We will excuse thee now! (*Exit Haman*)
(*To Hatach*) The royal wish
Is that the queen may enter! (*Hatach bows; goes
out to usher in the queen.*)

Harbonah

(*To the king*) Did the king
Observe this Haman's speech? He stammered like
As if his treach'rous tongue gave way before
Your majesty and would betray his guilt!
Believe not that he wants her life! He wants
The queen to grace the throne at which he aims!

(*Trumpets. Enter queen in royal apparel, preceded
by trumpeters in state uniform, by pages,
guards, etc. She is supported by Myrrhine and
Zerdatha. As she enters the pages, etc., file*

off. She hesitates at the sight of the king. According to tradition she faints away.)

Myrrhine

(Whispers) Have courage, Hadassah. It is for life!
Thou art the humble myrtle, Esther, thou,
The myrtle-Hadassah, the myrtle thou!

(Esther recovers, slowly advances. The king stretches the sceptre, which she touches as she kneels before him.)

King

What wilt thou, Esther, Queen of Persia, what
Is thy request? It shall be granted. Aye,
To half my realm what e'er thou'rt pleased to ask!

Esther

If it be good before the king, let him
And Haman come this day to banquet which
I have prepared for him!

King

It shall be done!
The royal word is given; let the wish
Of Esther be conveyed to Haman now
At once! *(Esther retires, procession files out.)*

Hatach

Your Majesty, it shall be done. *(Exit Hatach)*

King

(To Harbonah) Did'st mark her word, good Harbonah? She said

A banquet which she had prepared for HIM!
 Does this suggest collusion and a plan
 Already made, arranged between the two?
 What him? The king or Haman? Is her feast
 Prepared to honor me or him?—this him—
 It puzzles me—does it imply a plot?

Harbonah

No, no, your Majesty, the queen's too pure
 To link her hand with such a traitor! No!
 More likely Haman schemes and finds in her
 An innocent unconscious instrument
 To further his designs. He'd doubtless win
 At least her acquiescence in his plan,
 Contrive that she will compromise herself,
 Excite thy wrath, be slain and thus once rid
 Of one so faithful to thy interests,
 He will more easily enmesh the king!
 He loved her once—or did pretend! Mayhap
 He loves her yet! Mayhap he'd gain her hand
 As price to save her loved ones from death!

King

'Tis well! 'Tis well! I'll keep a careful watch.
 I do not doubt the queen; but what thou say'st
 Of Haman, opens wide my eyes. (*To courtiers*)
 My friends,
 'Tis time the court concludes; we will adjourn.

(*As king leaves in state procession forms as in Act
 III, Scene I.*)

Chorus. "ALL HAIL OF EARTHLY KINGS THE
 FIRST"

All hail of earthly kings the first!
 Long live the king, we cry

May all his foes be e'er dispersed
Like clouds across the sky!

As bend the boughs when tempest blows,
As leaves in autumn fall,
So bend and fall all Persia's foes;
In vain for help they call!

From lands remote the captives bring
For tribute all their store
To swell the treasures of the king,
The conqueror in war.

(The third or second and third verses may be omitted.)

Curtain falls

SCENE IV

(King's bedchamber. King, Harbonah, attendants, Choir outside.)

*Song. By Royal Choir. "ANGEL OF REST,
SPREAD THY WINGS O'ER US MORTALS"*

Quartette

Angel of rest, spread thy wings o'er us mortals,
Under thy shadow, O grant us repose!
Bid with thy magic fly open the portals
Leading to refuge from sorrow and woes.

Chorus

Haste, Holy Spirit, to weave with thy Pow'rs
Sleep's sweet enchantment, where, sighing for rest,
Mortals lie tossing through lead-footed hours,
Praying to be with thy kisses caressed,
Praying to be with thy kisses caressed!

Quartette

Come, gentle spirit, with mystery soothing,
 Whispering respite to hand and to brain,
 Calming anxiety, pain's pillow smoothing,
 Charming the soul with thy heavenly strain!

Chorus

Haste, Holy spirit, etc.

Quartette

Paint with thy witchery dreams that will lighten
 Life's heavy burden of sorrow and care,
 Visions of happiness, visions to brighten
 Hearts that are darkened with doubt and despair!

Chorus

Haste, Holy Spirit, etc.

King

The poorest peasant in the land at night
 Reposes free from care, his work forgot
 In restful sleep! The slave who seems to live
 To toil, without the faintest gleam of hope
 For his release, save that which death can bring,
 Finds happiness, when bound in slumber's chains.
 He dreams of freedom, peace, his earthly home,
 The land from which by conquest he was torn,
 But I? Ten thousand demons torture me!
 I toss and woo sweet slumber's kiss in vain!
 The wealth of e'en a monarch cannot buy
 One night's repose like that which nature gives,
 When dashing through his fevered brain his
 thoughts
 Fly, whipping ev'ry power of the soul
 To mad activity! What is't to be

A king? Enthroned in state, surrounded by
His courtiers, priests, and guards and slaves, he's
more

A solitary being than the fool
Who laughs when any sunbeam lights the air
And sets the dust-motes dancing! He can sport
And find no peril lurking! I, the king,
Must look askance at prince and slave alike!
For danger, death, may crouch at ev'ry side!
Suspicion, child of demon parentage,
When once thy whisper's breathed within the soul,
Thou poison'st ev'ry joy! Farewell to peace!
All friendship, love itself must die! The light
Of happiness which shines into the soul
From out the eyes in which we love to gaze
Is darkened! O for happiness! I'd change
My royalty for peasant's cot, could I
Be sure of happiness! I wonder if
A king of Persia ever was beset
With difficulties, perils, like I find
So multiplied around me! (*To Harbonah*) Bring
to me
The chronicles of Persia. Read therein!
I cannot sleep! Mayhap 'twill pass the time
Until the dawn shall roll the night away
And earth be waked to life again!

Harbonah

What part,
Your Majesty, shall't please you to be read?

King

(*Aside*) My soul with jealousy is full, despite
The words of Harbonah. (*To Harbonah*) I fain
would know

Did ever queen and prince plot death to king?
I'd have those stories read which will set forth

The death of Persia's monarchs that were met
By violence—(*Aside*) yet no! Why intimate
The fear which now unmans me? (*To Harbonah*)
Read to me

The story of the war across the sea
Where those brave men defended with their lives
A narrow pass against my chosen hosts,—
'Tis called Thermopylæ in Grecian tongue,—
I like a tale of bravery e'en when
It is a foe that shows it! It will turn
My thoughts! Perchance forgetting cares of state
I'll glide into a sleep for half the watch
That still remains! Yet, no! I'd rather hear
The story of my reign. This Haman, how
Did I advance him? 'Fore I made him great,
Who was he? Maybe his career will show
Why I have reason to suspect the man.
Is he ambitious? Is he prideful? Or
Does love of duty to his country and
His king so spur his heart that he forgets
His interests rememb'ring mine? Now read!

Harbonah

From o'er the sea came Memucan, new crowned
With glory. And the mighty king desired
To place him high above all princes, e'en
'Fore those whose privilege it was to be
Admitted to the royal presence. So
By royal order and command, which none
May change, it was decreed that Memucan
No more should be his name, but Haman, prince
Of all the princes. Thus was he to be
Rewarded. Slaves and gold and precious things
Should be presented in the royal name
To crown with wealth the man thus singled out
For honor. Time and season then were sought
By lot, to find a most propitious day

On which to honor him with title new,
 And in the presence of satraps, pachas,
 High princes, governors assembled, give
 To him the sign of royal trust and love.
 The day was found, but 'fore it came, a plot
 Most vile against the royal life was told
 By Mordecai, a son of one of these
 Enslavèd nations which are ruled by him
 Who first of earthly kings is throned in might.
 This Mordecai, of Yair son, whose sire,
 Shim'i, was son of Kish, revealed the plot
 To Esther, Persia's noble queen, who sent
 The word thereof to Persia's king. 'Twas sought
 And searched and thus two officers were seized;
 Bigtan was one; the other Teresh. Both
 Were hanged. Then came the day when Ha-
 man——

King

Stop!

This Mordecai, was he rewarded?

Harbonah

No,

Most gracious Majesty!

King

Who stands without?

Attendant

Prince Haman has arrived. He waits until——

King

Then bid him enter. (*Exit attendant*) Read no
 more! Enough! (*Enter Haman*)
 Ah, Haman, ever watchful of thy king!

Dost thou in very truth deny thyself
Of even sleep to guard thy monarch?

Haman

Sleep
Can never bind the eyes of those who love
The state and know their duty.

King

I have sent
To ask advice of thee. What shall be done
To him whom I desire to honor? Though
Good Harbonah who stands so high among
My trusted officers is present here,
I ask him not. For know my mind is full
Of what has just been read to me about
Thy victories across the sea.

Haman

(*Aside*) Now what
New honor doth the king design to give?
And then to whom except to me? And last
What honor do I need? Nor wealth nor slaves
Nor dignity do I require. And yet
I must say something! (*Thinks a moment*) Yes,
my enemy,
This Harbonah, I'll humble—he shall be
The instrument of Haman's honor! Aye
I'll please the king by asking modestly
That which he can bestow! And more, my plans
Shall be advanced to gradually show
The world that Haman holds the reins of state—
Then when the moment comes to kill the king
My right to hold the throne shall none deny!
(*Advancing*) Your Majesty, for him the man
whom thou,

The king, delightest to give honor, thus
Let me the humble servant of the king
Suggest. The royal robe which thou, the king,
Dost wear, the royal steed which thou, the king,
Dost ride, the royal crown which thou, the king,
Dost bear upon thy head, let all be brought.
Let him whom thou wouldst honor be arrayed
With these, the royal robes and crown, and placed
Upon the royal charger, led by one
Who stands among thy trusted officers
Right high, and who shall loud proclaim before
Him as he rides on horseback through the streets,
That thus shall it be done unto the man
The king delights to honor!

King

Go then, thou

And do as thou hast said to Mordecai
The Jew.

Haman

To Mordecai? (*Aside*) Ye gods, what fate
Is this? (*To the king*) Your Majesty, be pleased
to hear—
What I—this sudden resolution—if
It pleaseth thee,—perchance thou hast not
thought——

King

What aileth thee, Prince Haman—thou art pale!
Thou seem'st confused! Didst hear the king's
command?

Haman

Forgive me! Many Mordecais there are—
I would but ask which Mordecai thou mean'st—

King

(*To Harbonah*) Announce to him which Mordecai
I mean.

Harbonah

(*Reading*) One Mordecai, of Yair son, whose sire
Shim'i was son of Kish.

Haman

I go, O king,
Rejoiced and honored at the sign of trust
Which thou art pleased to place in me, thy slave!

(*Exit Haman. With glance of fury at Harbonah,
who bows with mock humility.*)

Harbonah

(*Advancing before the king*) Your majesty, it is in
keeping with
His cunning, cunning which hath overreached
Its aim and hath revealed not him whom thou,
O king, delight'st to honor—no, but him
Who is a traitor foul! Your majesty,
I scarce could hold my wrath! O king, when first
He heard thy words concerning him whom thou
Desir'd'st to honor, why, his eyes were all
Ablaze! His cheeks were flushed! His treach'rous
heart
Heaved quick his breast—he thought that thy in-
tent
Was honor fresh to heap upon himself!
Now mark, I pray thee, what he asked! Thy steed,
Which prancing with proud mettle, walks as if
He knew he bore earth's greatest king! And then
With thy robes robed, and more, with thy crown
crowned,

Prince Haman would be led through all the streets
Of this, thy capital, by him who next
Is ranked, and this high officer shall cry
That thus is done unto the man the king
Delights to honor. Mark him well! He will
Not wait until his wretched plan to take
Thy life shall ripen to success! He fain
Would show himself with royal state proclaimed
To all the people, ruling in thy place!
Thus all shall understand that he now sways
Instead of thee the sceptre, and that thou
Withdrawest from the cares of state. But not
As he to thee within thy presence dared
To lie,—that thou in pleasures ever new
Should'st take thy ease—O king! (*Kneeling*) O
mighty king!
I scarcely dare to say what this portends!

King

I bid thee speak!

Harbonah

Your Majesty, my life
Is thine!—'Tis better thou should'st take my life
Than that I should provoke thy righteous wrath—

King

Did'st hear me? Speak!

Harbonah

Your Majesty, the blood
Flies seething through my brain! I dare not—

King

Speak!

(*Leaps from couch, seizes Harbonah by the throat.*)

Harbonah

That thou art mad—insane—thy reason fled
And therefore for the safety of the realm
Thou art deposed!—So Haman would pretend!—
That thou must be removed from Persia's throne
And must be placed where "pleasures ever new"
Shall wait upon thy whims! As when they give
Some wisps of straw to those whose sense hath gone,
To weave as fancy pleases while they laugh
A joyous laugh and look with dullèd eye!
This plan is not a sudden thought of his!—
For many years his wicked purpose fixed,
Determinèd, hath been to lead astray
The minds of all thy faithful subjects! Thus
He hath proceeded. Years ago, O king,
Thou heldest counsel for the war with Greece.
Then Haman noised it that weak cowardice
Unnerved thee, that responsibility
Thou shirkedst, so that, if defeated, thou
Wouldst have no blame. Yea, more, that if thou
call'dst

From distant provinces some men who ne'er
Had heard the name of Greece to plan a fight
With her, then thou wert mad, insane, unfit
To be the king! And then a question rose,
Whereon this subtle knave declared that thou
Didst waste in riot and in wine the wealth
Of Persia! At that feast he drugged thy cup
And led thee to the bet that with the queen
No woman's beauty vied. He egged thee on
To send for Vashti. Well he knew she would
Refuse! For when did ever royal queen
Display her face to drunken men? I heard
The dastard say the king was drunk or mad
Or both! Thus disrespect, the mother of

Disloyalty, he spread! Again he urged,
 With fawning voice and cringing words, to send
 The queen away, lest her example should
 Inspire all wives their husbands to despise!
 Thou didst comply! "'Tis further evidence
 Of Madness," said the knave, "The king knows
 well

The queen was right! He thus rewards her!"
 Thus

He jeered thee! Then he bade thee summon all
 The maids from every home within thy realm
 To come to thee that thou might'st choose a queen
 Instead of Vashti. Thus to mutiny
 He stirred all fathers, brothers, lovers too!
 They cursed the king who'd rob them of their
 loved!

They swore defiance! Then he crushed them down!
 But cunningly. For soldiery he loosed
 By edict signed and sealed by thee, O king,
 While he declared he mourned for Persia's woe!
 The hypocrite! The traitor! Then he caused
 Thee to proclaim that every man should as
 The master rule in his own house! As if
 The world knew not this universal law!
 And thus again the traitor dared to hold
 Thee up for ridicule, for men to mock
 And women-folk to jeer. 'Twas then he tore
 From out her humble home of peace and love
 Thy queen, then gentle Hadassah, to stand
 With other maids for thee to see.

'Twas not to do thy will, it was to wreak
 Revenge because she would not be his wife!
 For he had sworn that she should be the toy
 Of some Satrap! And if by any chance
 She should be chosen to be queen, he'd find
 The means to murder her!

King

What! Lift a hand
Against my queen?

Harbonah

Aye, here's the letter which
He sent—four lines will show his heart! (*Reads*)

" 'Tis I

Who tear thee from thy home, and if mischance
Should place the crown upon thy brow, within
A day I'd poison thee, I have the means!"
And Hadassah, this simple Jewish maid
Who spurned him in contempt for tempting her
To break her promise to her dying sire
And wed an alien to her faith, is now
By fate, the queen, e'en Esther!

King

O ye gods!
What mystery! What Fate! As he would seek
To slay the queen, he'd also slay the king!

Harbonah

Then next he caused thee to proclaim a law
That all the Jews in all thy realm should be
Consigned to death—the old, the young, the men,
The women and the children; and their goods
Should be the spoil of him who liked. 'Tis hard,
O king, to paint the mischief, misery
And wrong which has resulted! All trade's
Unhinged. The merchants will not trust, lest him
They trust be proved a Jew, and then be slain
By one who'd seize their goods. The Jews who
hold
Within their hands much commerce, and who give
Employment, bread to thousands of thy slaves,

Those Jews so active and industrious,
So bold in ventures, enterprises, say
'Tis better that they realize and go
To other lands, to Egypt or to Greece.
Nor are their poor forgotten, for the rich
Have joined their monies just to send away
Their poorer brethren who are destitute!
But mark the craft of Memucan! He stirs
The cutthroats, murderers, and thieves and knaves
To scent a harvest in the pillage of
The Jews, and in anticipation, loose
Their passions vile! The rich say they will miss
The Jews who are the instruments where brains
And energy and industry are asked.
The poor declare that never do they lack
For aid, nor suffer if they find a Jew!
To give for charity is part of Jew's
Religion. Thus it is that Jewish poor
Become no charge unto the state. But most
Of all, the honorable in thy realm
Lament thy law to kill the Jews. Their crime,
What is it? Are they traitors? Are their lives
So lived that they disgrace the royal state?
O that the Persian would but imitate
Their purity! They are not drunkards, thieves
Nor cutthroats! Never are they numbered 'mong
The dangerous who lurk in every town
To rob or move to mutiny! Their wives
And daughters are most chaste. Their sons are true
And most respectful to their sires. They love
Their law. That law 'tis different, as said
Prince Haman. Yes. Because the teachings of
Their elders, teachers and their learned men
Interpreting the law, impel them all
To lead good lives. It makes them all good men,
Good women and good subjects to their king!
This law they study day and night. For well

They know that if the study of the law
Should be neglected so that they become
But Jews in name, instead of Jews in lives
They lead, they'll lose the grace of God and man.
'Tis thus the story of their history,
That loyalty unto their law means that
Their God "will bless, preserve them, cause His
face
To shine upon them and will grant them grace,
That He upon them will His countenance
Uplift, and give them peace," the greatest boon!
O king, O mighty king, the people say
That thou, to order death to all the Jews,
The peaceful, law-abiding, active race,
Who add so much unto thy kingdom's wealth,
That thou'rt bereft of all thy senses! More,
That if more evidence shall be adduced
To show that thou art mad, thy throne shall be
Declared vacant, and thyself removed!
Then Haman rules for thee until thy brain
Shall gain the power to think and wisely guide
The state! When thinkest thou, O king, if once
Prince Haman rules, thou wilt return to sit
Anew upon thy throne? Thou know'st that death
Will swiftly wait on malady, if he,
A master of the healing art, direct
Thy cure! He'd go forth now with thy robes
robed,
With thy crown crowned, bestriding royal steed
To be proclaimed by thy command the man
Whom thou delight'st to honor! That's to say
The man whom thou dost designate to be
Before all others honored! So that in
Emergency, for instance, if by any chance
Thy health should fail, thy reason lose its sway,
Or if thy death should come, all men shall look
To him whom thou delight'st to honor, to

Succeed unto thy royal duties. What!
He said to wear thy robes and crown! It shows
He now is ready both the crown and throne
To grasp! Already hath he issued laws
With thy seal sealed, and not with his, to say
That all the tithes and customs, tolls and gifts
By which thy revenues are made, shall flow
Henceforth unto collectors whom he names!

King

By what right useth he my seal?

Harbonah

O king,
Thou lentest him thy ring to seal the law
By which the Hebrew race is doomed to die!

King

And hath he thus abused my confidence?

Harbonah

Behold a copy of the law thus sealed. (*Draws
from girdle a scroll*)
Demanding tithes and tolls! It saith
That in thy absence Haman rules for thee
By thy command!

King

I never said such thing!
The traitor hath abused my trust! He dies!
O friend most false! O hypocrite most vile!
Foul parasite! The anger of a king
Thou swift shalt know! Now leave me, Har-
bonah,

Unto my thoughts. The night hath passed and
 sleep
 Hath fled from out my brain which throbs and
 leaps
 With what thou hast recounted! I will rest
 And think how best to crush this crafty knave!

*(King reclines on his couch. Royal choir sings
 softly as follows:)*

Royal Choir. HYMN, "TO THE DAWN"—"LO,
 THE FIRST FLUSH OF THE ROSE-TINTED
 MORNING"

Quartette

Lo, the first flush of rose-tinted morning!
 Vanish, ye shadows, that stalk in the night,
 Haste to your dens ere the light that is dawning
 Take from earth's children your life-killing
 blight.

Chorus

Welcome, O brightness, that heralds the morrow!
 Hail, Holy light, with thy brilliancies blessed!
 Bring to the suff'ring surcease of all sorrow,
 Bring renewed life to the sleepers at rest,
 Bring renewed life to the sleepers at rest!

Harbonah (Stepping forward)

Thou God, of whom I learned of Mordecai
 And learning thus, have learned to honor Thee!
 Thou art the God of Pity—that I know!—
 And if Thy will I would perform, I ought
 Myself to conquer, and I ought to show
 To Memucan my foe, compassion! Yea,
 I know that Thou art merciful, and I,

To do Thy will, should pardon e'en a foe!
 Great God! My mother and my wife he slew
 When I was absent! Me he falsely charged
 With treason! All my children at his word
 Were strangled!—Through his lies I passed long
 years

An exile, and of all that's dear bereaved!
 Myself he maimed, with maiming foul, most vile!
 Can I forgive a villain such as he?
 I must? Then was I wrong to loose my tongue?
 O, if my private wrongs have winged my words
 With venom'd plume, while warning Persia's king
 Of public woes contrived by Memucan,
 Forgive me, O forgive me, mighty God!
 I was a savage until Mordecai,
 So good, first whispered me Thy Name! And
 now,—

If hatred and revenge both tear my heart,
 God, pity me! I only am a man!

Curtain

ACT III

SCENE V

(An anteroom of the palace)

Myrrhine

The Queen to-day a second banquet gives.

Zerdatha

Yes, so 'tis said, but where?

Myrrhine

Thou know'st the hall
 Adjoining this, the minor banquet hall,
 It looks upon the royal garden. There
 The feast is spread. But Haman tarries yet.
 (*Enter Hatach*)

Hatach

My ladies, if it please you, I would beg
 You wait upon her majesty. The hour
 Appointed for the banquet is at hand,
 And here Prince Haman comes, so late that word
 (*Exeunt Myrrhine and Zerdatha. Trumpets
 sound.*)

Of urgent haste I twice despatched, for both
 The king and queen are angered through delay.
 (*Enter Haman with attendants*)
 (*To Haman*) If now it please, sir prince, I will
 acquaint
 Their majesties who long have waited you. (*Exit
 Hatach*)

Haman

(*Soliloquizes*) A chilling parting Zeresh gave me
 when
 I left! When I had told her all the strange
 Occurrence of the morn, how that the plan
 Concerning Mordecai was quite reversed
 And he whom I had thought to hang, instead
 I had to honor, speaking loud she cried
 (And she is wondrous skilled in mystic lore),
 "If Mordecai is one of Jewish race
 Before whose star thine own begins to pale,
 Thou'lt fall before him!"—Then I'm hurried here!
 I learn the banquet waits, the king is vexed,
 And Harbonah in royal favor high

Is placed! As if the net were closing round
And adverse fates were clamorous for me
To be their victim! Worst of all, the queen
At yestern's banquet called me Memucan!
Mayhap it was mistake of hers, mayhap
It was my fancy, but if Esther did
In Haman recognize the Memucan
Of old, my fate is sealed, for David's death
Yet cries aloud against me! Ah, they come!

*(Trumpets sound both ends. Enter, L., Pages,
King, Harbonah, Guards. Enter, R., Pages,
Queen, Myrrhine, Zerdatha, Guards.)*

Haman

(Aside) He gives me not a welcome as of old!
He frowns upon me! What does that portend?
Nor does the Queen bestow upon me e'en
A glance! My heart is cold! Is Zeresh right?

King

(Speaks coldly)

So, Haman, thou art here. *(To Esther)* Your
Majesty,
Your guest is present; shall we now adjourn?

*(Queen bows. King takes her hand, leads her to
the banquet table which is disclosed by the
scene opening upon it. Divans are ranged
round the table which is brilliantly lit and
Hatach and Harbonah take up position each
side, Haman following King and Queen. He
takes his place at the table on left of king;
queen on right. Music meanwhile. Wine is
handed which the attendants taste first, to*

show there is no poison. Or it can be dispensed with.)

King

I'll pledge thee, Esther. What would'st have of me!
Petition or request? 'Tis done, to half
My realm thou mayest ask. Thy word's my law!

Esther

(Coming forward) Your Majesty, another banquet waits!

The guests are fire and sword, high treason, death,
The ravens of the air, the dogs that roam
The streets, the passions of the human breast!
The music of the banquet is the shriek
Of men and women, tender children too,
The roar of flame, the shouts of demons, aye,
The cries of victims, and among them one
Who sits on Persia's royal throne!

King

(Alarmed and passing before Haman to front)

What? Death!
'Tis treason! Harbonah! Ho! Guards!

(Harbonah signals, guards advance to side of Haman.)

Esther

(Kneeling before the king) Aye, King!
'Tis treason foul and dastardly, but not
Against thy life,—I'd die to save thee harm!

(Kisses king's hand)

King

What is it, then? Remember what thou ask'st—
Petition or request! 'Tis done! To half
My realm thou mayest ask! Thy word's my law!

Esther

(*Still kneeling*) If I have found before thee grace,
O king,
And if it please your majesty, oh spare
My life at my petition, and the life
Of all my people; this is my request!
For we are sold; my people, I, to be
Together slain, exterminated! Yet
If we to servitude were sold I then
Would silence keep! But no! The foe forgets
The damage to the king!

King

Why, who is he
And where is he, whose heart emboldens him
To plot——

Esther

(*Interrupts; she rises to her feet and points to
Haman.*)
Thy foe, thy enemy, 'tis he
The wicked Haman!

King

Eh?

Esther

(*Staggers, is supported by Zerdatha and Myrrhine,
who lead her to the couch*)

O saved! My dream!
O myrtle, saved! (*Falls on couch*)

My life, but by insulting Persia's queen
Before my very face!

Harbonah

(*Bowing*) The court attends!

(*Scene in rear opens and discloses courtiers, etc.,
who enter, R. L.*)

Esther

Your Majesty, this Mordecai to me
Is nearest kin, and he in place of both
My parents, who are dead, has nourished me.

King

He shall succeed to Haman's honors all!

Esther

He now is here with all my dearest friends
Of early days.

(*Enter all the companions of Esther. Courtiers in
rear, friends across center, guards at side, Ha-
man, L., Mordecai next, King centre, Esther,
Harbonah R. Grand march while positions
are taken.*)

King

(*To Mordecai*) Thou, Mordecai, I know
Thy heart's integrity and all that thou
Hast done for me and Persia's queen. 'Tis ill
Repaid by what I do, but yet 'tis all
I can. I make thee prince in Haman's stead,
The prince of all the princes, aye, the first!

(*Gives Mordecai the ring which a guard removes
from Haman's finger.*)

Mordecai

Your Majesty, my heart is much too full
 To even thank thee! All my thoughts to God
 Are turned in gratitude, too great to be
 Expressed, for granting us deliverance
 So wondrous! Next to Him, to thee I give
 My thanks and shall with ev'ry effort strive
 To prove thy royal trust is not misplaced!

King

'Tis well, 'tis well! We will at once take steps
 To save thy race the Jews; for though a law
 Of Persia once in force can never be
 Repealed, we will its purpose nullify
 By publishing an edict to protect
 The unoffending nation.

Mordecai

(*Loudly to all*) Now if I
 Have any power as the chief of all
 Of Persia's princes, let my first command
 Be that we all unite in praise to God
 For saving thus His chosen race again!

All in Grand Chorus

Amen!

Glory to God. Honor the Name
 Of Israel's Guardian,—Praise ye the Lord!

YE NATIONS ALL! (*Psalm 117*)

Ye nations all, your voices raise
 In unison the Lord to praise!
 Ye peoples all, the chorus swell,
 And sing to Him in great Hallel!

Amen.

Exceeding mercy doth He bear
To us, His children, 'neath His care!
His truth's for aye! O praise the Lord
Who thus is worshipped, thus adored!
Amen!

APPENDIX

Note. INTERMARRIAGE

Intermarriage between members of different sects produces often religious or social friction, apt to be intensified as the children grow up, and certain to prevent much, if not all, of that family union in which men and women find the surest happiness in life.

I have known this evidenced in intermarriage even between members of two different Protestant sects.

Between Catholic and Protestant, intermarriage is strictly forbidden, as it is between Jew and Christian.

Sermons reach but few. Therefore sermons on Intermarriage cannot affect the masses.

Novels whose theme is intermarriage sometimes obtain wide circulation, such as "Robert Elsmere," where incompatibility of religious ideas between husband and wife profoundly affects both, and "The Yoke of the Torah," where life is seared because one is a Jew and the other a Christian.

The dramatic story of Esther presents the intermarriage of a Jewess and a non-Jew. It affords opportunity to give expression to such unhappy results of intermarriage as violation of religious tenets, family ostracism, social friction, trammelled hospitality, friendships cooled or alienated, patronizing toleration that galls instead of mollifies, contempt, ridicule, grief to parents all the more acute because silently borne; secret regrets for having given par-

ents pain, decay of religious consciousness,—these are some of the consequences.

Hence the courtship scene between Esther and Memucan and the scene concerning Jered.¹

Intermarriage fosters family disunion and compels the contracting parties to choose between religious apathy, uncomfortable surrender of principles, moral cowardice or cowardly hypocrisy.

Neither family union nor true citizenship is possible without spirituality or religion. Therefore intermarriage is to be sternly and uncompromisingly condemned.

¹The *Frankfurter Zeitung* contains some remarkable figures on intermarriage in Germany during the war. "From 1901 to 1913 the intermarriage of Protestants rose from 3 per cent, that of the Catholics about 4½ per cent, while among the Jews it went up from 16.97 per cent in 1901 to 30.98 per cent in 1913. Since 1914 intermarriages have decreased markedly in the case of non-Jews, but the figures show an alarming increase in the case of Jews. Against every 100 unmixed marriages between Jews there are no less than fifty-three mixed marriages. The conditions of war which brought a great number of hasty unions is no doubt accountable in a measure for the abnormal rise. Whatever the causes, it will be interesting to see whether the process will continue to develop at the same rate when normal conditions are restored.



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